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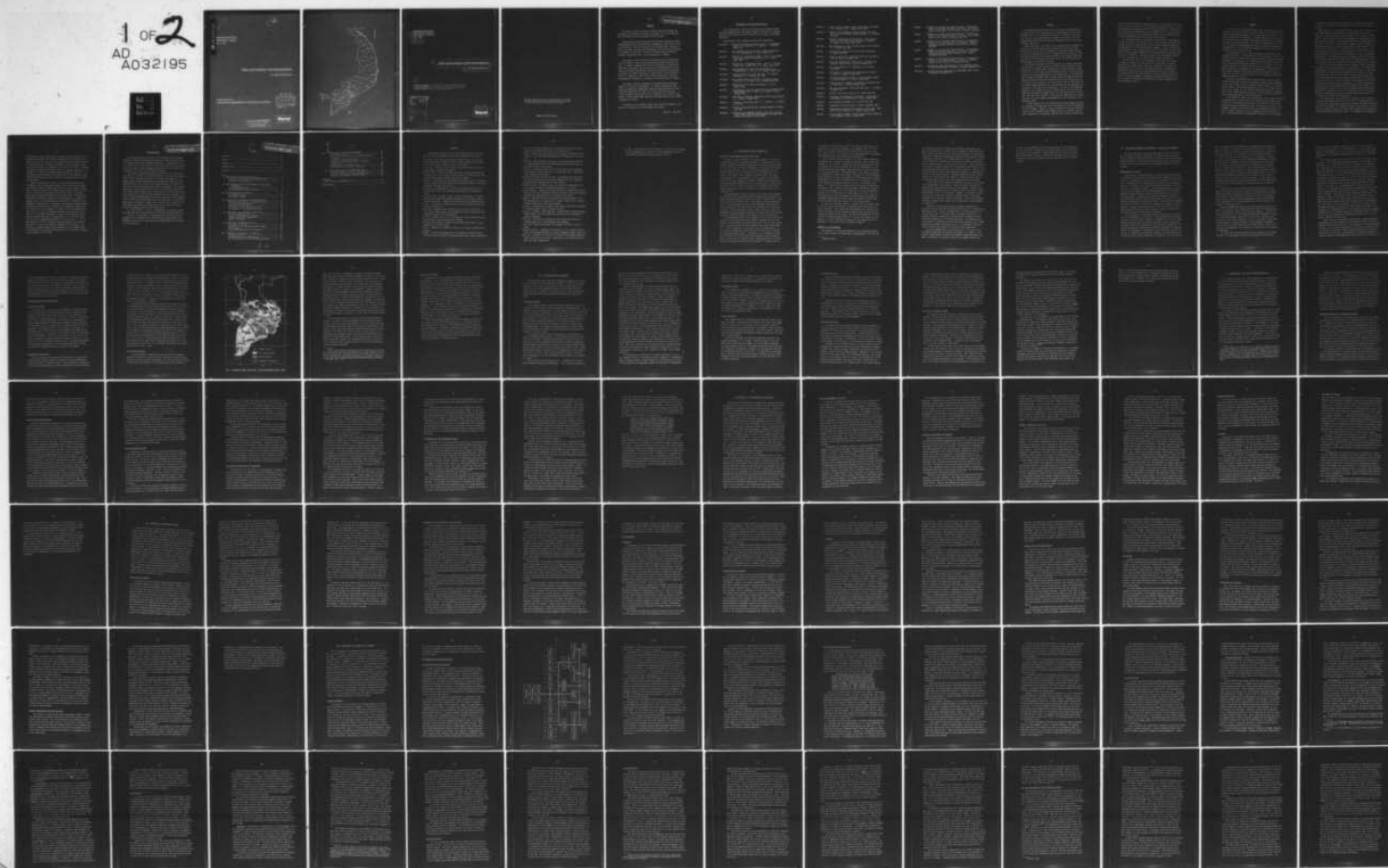
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THE INSURGENT ENVIRONMENT

R. Michael Pearce

PREPARED FOR:
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10 R. Michael Pearce

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FOREWORD

This report is one of a series of Rand studies that examine the organization, operations, motivation, and morale of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces that fought in South Vietnam.

Between August 1964 and December 1968 The Rand Corporation conducted approximately 2400 interviews with Vietnamese who were familiar with the activities of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese army. Reports of those interviews, totaling some 62,000 pages, were reviewed and released to the public in June 1972. They can be obtained from the National Technical Information Service of the Department of Commerce.

The release of the interviews has made possible the declassification and release of some of the classified Rand reports derived from them. To remain consistent with the policy followed in reviewing the interviews, information that could lead to the identification of individual interviewees was deleted, along with a few specific references to sources that remain classified. In most cases, it was necessary to drop or to change only a word or two, and in some cases, a footnote. The meaning of a sentence or the intent of the author was not altered.

The reports contain information and interpretations relating to issues that are still being debated. It should be pointed out that there was substantive disagreement among the Rand researchers involved in Vietnam research at the time, and contrary points of view with totally different implications for U.S. operations can be found in the reports. This internal debate mirrored the debate that was then current throughout the nation.

A complete list of the Rand reports that have been released to the public is contained in the bibliography that follows.

(CRC, BJ: May 1975)

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For a description of the Viet Cong Motivation and Morale Project and interviewing process, the reader should first consult W. Phillips Davison, *User's Guide to the Rand Interviews in Vietnam*, R-1024-ARPA, March 1972.

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PREFACE

This Memorandum describes Viet Cong activities in acquiring and maintaining control of the population in rural villages of South Vietnam since 1954. It is based upon more than 100 interviews with peasants living in Viet Cong-controlled villages, other data collected in Vietnam during 1965-1967, and captured documents and other relevant unclassified materials.

While the current conditions in Viet Cong-controlled villages have often been speculated upon in press reports from Vietnam and other sources, few, if any, in-depth analyses of the actual events leading to the Viet Cong takeover of these villages have been attempted. None has relied primarily upon evidence provided by the peasants themselves, who have for too long been silent witnesses to the revolutionary war being fought in their native villages.

The manifold problems of Viet Cong control of village populations and its effects upon the peasants were first detected during the field work portion of a RAND study of pacification in the Vietnamese village of Duc Lap. At that time, several questions arose as to the nature and extent of Viet Cong organization in the village prior to the attempt by the Government of Vietnam (GVN) to regain control through pacification. Personal anecdotes about Viet Cong activities in the villages were often related by the peasants in Duc Lap, but the scope of that study did not permit organizing these bits of information into any meaningful description of Viet Cong control techniques. Yet one of the fundamental reasons for the ultimate collapse of pacification in Duc Lap (and the many other Vietnamese villages like it) was the GVN's failure to understand the nature and functions of the Viet Cong organization in the village and to provide adequate countermeasures to the activities of the insurgent cadres.

A prime target of the U.S./GVN Revolutionary Development pacification program in Vietnam today is the so-called Viet Cong infrastructure in rural villages. However, it must be pointed out that the infrastructure in a Viet Cong-controlled village is made up of people; some are fully committed to the insurgent organization as cadres and guerrillas,

others voluntarily support or actively work for the insurgents, but the majority of the villagers have been impressed through misfortune or other circumstances into supporting the Viet Cong involuntarily. Indiscriminate pacification programs aimed at eliminating the infrastructure without at least making a basic distinction between types of people living in such villages will ultimately do more harm than good.

The following narrative, therefore, is an attempt to shed light on what has happened in the rural villages of South Vietnam during the last 15 years in order to make possible a more discriminating and effective implementation of U.S./GVN pacification programs. A short introduction to the peasants' role in revolutionary war is followed by a section dealing with the conceptual framework of the analysis and the data base upon which it is formulated. The study focuses on the interrelationship between the insurgent Viet Cong and the rural peasant population.

The author has perceived five phases in this interrelationship that lead to complete Viet Cong control of the village. It must be understood that these phases, which are delineated to facilitate an understanding of the nature of Viet Cong activities, are abstract descriptions of events that have already taken place in the villages. The culmination of Viet Cong activities in rural villages is the creation of a new environment--an insurgent environment in which all social, economic, and political activities of the rural population are under insurgent control.

SUMMARY

It is a generally accepted principle that success in modern revolutionary war, as typified by the present conflict in Vietnam, depends largely on gaining the support of the peasant mass for recruits, supplies, information, and sanctuary. Equally important to such a war is an elite group that can organize the peasants and develop a revolutionary base in the rural villages. The effective combination of an extensive village-level organization and a favorable peasant-insurgent relationship is one of the enduring strengths of the Viet Cong in its revolutionary war against the GVN.

The development of such a peasant-insurgent relationship passes through five phases: (1) *Recognition* by the revolutionary elite of conditions within the traditional village environment that are potentially exploitable for insurgency; (2) *Adaptation* of revolutionary activities to the recognized preinsurgency conditions; (3) *Disruption* of the traditional patterns of administrative and social activities in the villages to separate the peasants from the government; (4) *Domination* of the peasants through revolutionary organizations created in the villages; (5) *Direction* of all activities in the villages to provide continuing support for the war.

During the *recognition* phase, which generally occurred in South Vietnam between 1954 and 1956, revolutionary cadres worked underground in the rural villages, trying to organize popular support for antigovernment efforts. The Diem government was aware of the cadres' activities in the villages and made several halfhearted attempts to suppress them, but its indiscriminate accusations and reprisals only aroused further antigovernment feeling among the peasants.

In the *adaptation* phase, the revolutionary cadres quickly exploited the unpopularity of GVN activities; for example, they accused Diem of betraying the Vietnamese people because he refused to hold the reunification plebiscite scheduled for 1956. Revolutionary activity in the villages increased, and popular associations designed to further involve the mass of peasants in the struggle against the GVN were created. Characteristically, the government's reaction to the increased

revolutionary threat was ineffectual, and its attempts to divorce the insurgents from the peasants by programs of forced relocation were ill-conceived.

The formation of the National Liberation Front (NLF) of South Vietnam in 1960 marked the centralization of what had previously been a fragmented, localized threat to the government. NLF cadres now worked openly in many villages to *disrupt* the government's administrative and military activities and to develop additional peasant organizations for the support of the war. The increased insurgent activity required increased peasant support, and NLF cadres began to employ selective terrorization to ensure control of the resources in the villages. Many social changes occurred in villages, among them the rise of artificial divisions among the peasants and the breakdown of family and personal relationships. By disrupting not only government activities but also the traditional patterns of village life, the cadres worked to create an environment into which the NLF could move and establish full control.

Such control usually evolved after a village had been "liberated" and the NLF had gained *domination* over the peasants. Virtually all NLF organizations and activities in the villages were aimed at controlling the peasants and channeling their resources for the war. To protect its revolutionary base in the villages, the NLF introduced intricate security systems based on mutual peasant surveillance. When NLF guerrilla forces took on a more active military role against the GVN, the intensity of fighting in the villages grew. To counter NLF expansion, Diem introduced the countrywide Strategic Hamlet Program (SHP), which was planned to provide security for the peasants while simultaneously denying their resources to the NLF. Unfortunately, the ill-conceived and badly administered program failed, which further helped the NLF consolidate its control over the peasants.

The ultimate goal of the NLF was to establish in the villages an insurgent environment wherein all activities of the peasants were *directed* by the revolutionary organization. Because the cadres completely controlled the peasants in liberated villages, there was little reaction when the communist character of the NLF was revealed by the formation of the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP). The Communist Party apparatus

is pervasive in the villages, and it forms an important element of the insurgent environment. One notable characteristic of controlled villages is the virtual isolation of the peasants from one another because of the extensive web of "people's security," in which peasants watch each other and report all suspicious activities to the cadres. Economic production is tightly controlled so that all necessary resources of the villages go to support the revolutionary armed forces. Political indoctrination and involvement are a regular part of the peasants' lives; conscription provides the Viet Cong with a continuing source of cadres and guerrillas.

Despite continual cadre efforts to gain voluntary support from the peasants, the harshness and rigidity of the insurgent environment has produced peasant disaffection with the Viet Cong, caused in large part by the disruption of the village social structure, the strict control of population and resources, and the activities of guerrillas, which lead to government bombing and artillery attacks. Although this disaffection has made the peasants lose confidence in an eventual insurgent victory, the government has not been able to capitalize on the insurgents' vulnerabilities. Repeatedly, GVN efforts to regain peasant support have failed either to recognize the fundamental changes that have occurred in rural villages as a result of Viet Cong organization and control or to plan and implement programs offering viable alternatives to the insurgent environment. Often, the GVN indiscriminately pursues military objectives in villages when in fact the real target is the political organization embodied by Viet Cong cadres. Part of the failing is the lack of properly trained, motivated, and directed GVN cadres to carry out pacification programs in the villages. The GVN has not regained peasant support because it has not demonstrated to the peasants in any conclusive fashion that it is capable of winning the war against the Viet Cong.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Interviewing peasants who live in Viet Cong-controlled villages presents a variety of problems which could not have been overcome without a great deal of help from many individuals. Considering the lack of security in most rural areas of Vietnam (especially those controlled by the Viet Cong), the most dangerous task was the actual interviewing of peasants in or near their controlled villages.

Most sincere thanks and admiration go to two of the interviewers, Vinh and Thua. Neither of them was a trained interviewer, and probably neither fully understood the purpose of the work they undertook; yet without their intimate knowledge of the people and villages of the Mekong Delta this study could not have been undertaken. The efforts of Te and his team of interviewers were equally commendable. They managed marvelously to shift their work in and out of Viet Cong-controlled areas, often at great personal risk. Tan proved to be a continual source of strength and knowledge about the smallest and largest details of the study. Although disagreements with him were numerous, the interviewing could not have been accomplished without his assistance. Most sincere appreciation is extended to Hanh, the only woman on the team, who not only worked tirelessly at the typewriter but also undertook the difficult and dangerous task of field interviewing.

Mr. John W. Ellis, Jr. and Mr. Konrad Kellen of The RAND Corporation read the entire draft manuscript and offered valuable suggestions.

Finally, it is necessary to acknowledge the contribution of the peasants in the villages of South Vietnam, whose conversations--held sometimes at the risk of their lives--were indispensable to the completion of this study.

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GLOSSARY

The following Vietnamese terms, which appear frequently throughout the text, are presented here for easy reference by the reader.

ban chong - often called naily board, or spike trap, a piece of wood with spikes driven through it which is placed upright in the bottom of a pit or trap to impale the foot of the victim.

ban co nang - landless or poor peasant, the lowest class of the Viet Cong peasant classification system.

binh san luong - economic leveling, the process whereby the social and economic status of the higher peasant classes is lowered to the level of the former landless peasants and tenant farmers.

binh van - a combination of the terms *binh* (military) and *van* (civilian), used to identify the Viet Cong proselyting program aimed at recruiting government soldiers and officials.

Binh Xuyen - an organization of river pirates and racketeers that controlled much of the vice, gambling, and smuggling in Saigon after 1954.

can bo nam vung - literally, cadres lying in the ground, i.e., the former Viet Minh cadres who remained underground in villages of South Vietnam after 1954. Peasants often refer to them as "sleeping cadres."

Cao Dai - a syncretic religious sect of one million members with headquarters at Tay Ninh.

chinh huan - commonly called reeducation, the process of political correctional training given to both peasants and cadres considered to be antirevolutionary, or pro-government.

dan cong - people's labor, i.e., the compulsory labor performed by peasants living in Viet Cong-controlled villages.

Dang Nhan Dan Cach Mang - People's Revolutionary Party (PRP), the Communist Party in South Vietnam.

dia chu - landowner, the highest category of the peasant classification system.

Diem-My - literally, Diem-Americans, a term that was commonly used by the Viet Cong to describe the Diem government and its allied supporters.

Hoa Hao - a reformist Buddhist sect of more than one million members located in the western provinces of the Mekong Delta.

Hoc Tap - studies, lectures, and discussion sessions through which the policies of the Viet Cong organization are disseminated to the peasants.

kiem thao - self-criticism, the process of criticizing oneself prior to confessing past errors or antirevolutionary activities; part of the general *chinh huan* process.

Lien Viet - a shortened form of *Hoi Lien Hiep Quoc Dan Viet Nam* (National Popular Front Association), a broad-based front organization that included the Viet Minh.

Mat Tran Giai Phong Mien Nam Viet Nam - The National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, the political front organization that ostensibly directs the revolutionary war in South Vietnam.

Mat Tran To Quoc - Fatherland Front, an unsuccessful organization set up in North Vietnam for clandestine activities in the South.

ngu gia lien bao - families for mutual protection, a population control method of the Viet Cong whereby several families were grouped together and each made responsible for the actions of the others.

Nong Hoi - shortened form of *Hoi Nong Dan Giai Phong* (Farmers' Liberation Association), an organization of peasant farmers used to control economic production in Viet Cong villages.

phu nong - rich peasant (according to the peasant classification system, one owning between 5 and 50 hectares of land).

tam cung - literally, three together; a device used by cadres and guerrillas whereby they would work, eat, and sleep with the peasants to support themselves.

Thanh Lao - Labor Youth, a specialized youth group that served as a training ground for future Communist Party members.

trung nong - middle-class peasant (one owning 5 hectares of land or less).

truong ky mai phuc - permanent infiltration, i.e., the general activities of the underground cadres in South Vietnamese villages after 1954.

Viet Cong - pejorative of the term *Viet Cong-san* (Vietnamese communist), used by the GVN and its allies to describe both the individual insurgents and their organization.

Viet Minh - a shortened form of *Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi* (League for the Independence of Vietnam), a front organization composed of nationalist and communist groups fighting the French.

I. THE PEASANTS AND REVOLUTIONARY WAR

THE ROLE OF THE PEASANT IN REVOLUTIONARY WAR

Contrary to classic Marxist revolutionary dogma (i.e., that the only genuine source of revolutionary power is the proletariat), a consistent contention of communist proponents of modern revolutionary war has been that one of the basic requirements for success is the support of the rural population. Mao Tse-tung, who recognized as early as 1938 the value of the rural population in revolutionary war, once stated, "The richest source of power to wage war lies in the masses of the people."⁽¹⁾ Upon completion of the successful revolutionary war of the Viet Minh against the French, Vo Nguyen Giap claimed that "Our Resistance War [was] the work of the entire people. Therein lies the key to victory. [The] war proceeded in a backward agricultural country where the peasants...constituted the essential force of the revolution."⁽²⁾

The applicability of Mao's doctrine to the current revolutionary war in South Vietnam was demonstrated in Chinese Defense Minister Lin Piao's now-famous article in the *Peking Review* of November 1965, "Long Live the Victory of People's War." Lin appears to have reaffirmed to the Viet Cong insurgents and their North Vietnamese supporters the basic principles of revolutionary war set down more than 30 years ago in Yenan. In his restatement of Mao's durable theory Lin explicitly emphasized that "the peasants constitute the main force of the national-democratic revolution against the imperialists and their lackeys."

The indispensable role of the peasantry in the current revolutionary war in South Vietnam has been confirmed repeatedly by Viet Cong emphasis on establishing and maintaining control over the rural population. Despite the many differences between the current revolutionary war in South Vietnam and its Chinese and Viet Minh predecessors, the Viet Cong have apparently adhered faithfully to the overall strategy of organizing peasant support. According to one contemporary writer, the activities of the Viet Cong are not different from the communist point of view, but are rather a classic communist synthesis of organizational principles and operational procedures.⁽³⁾ Douglas Pike, in

the preface to his book *Viet Cong*,⁽⁴⁾ confirmed the importance of organization to the current insurgents. He commented that "If the essence of the Chinese revolution was *strategy* and the essence of the Viet Minh was *spirit*, the essence of the third-generation revolutionary guerrilla warfare in South Vietnam was *organization*."

One of the most notable successes of the Viet Cong has been the organization of a support base among the peasants living in the rural villages of South Vietnam. Because the Viet Cong depend heavily upon the peasants for rice and recruits, the careful development of a relationship between the insurgent organization and the rural population is of primary importance. The significance of this aspect of the war was recognized by a writer who stated, "The main key to the understanding of guerrilla war has to be sought not in the marvels of the rebels' organization, but in their *interrelation with the peasantry*,^{*} not only in the military techniques of the few, but in the sociology of the masses."⁽⁵⁾ This effective combination of an extensive village-level organization and a favorable peasant-insurgent relationship is one of the enduring strengths of the Viet Cong that has proved exceptionally difficult for the Government of Vietnam (GVN) to overcome. The repeated failures of past and present U.S./GVN efforts to dislodge the insurgent organization from the villages and separate the Viet Cong from the peasant population attest to the Viet Cong success.

It would be inaccurate, however, to assume that the support given to the Viet Cong by the majority of villagers under their control is wholly voluntary. Such control has been achieved only through an intricate organizational web affecting virtually every activity of the individual peasant in his village. The manifold problems of Viet Cong control of village populations and the effect of this control on the peasants were first investigated during the field work portion of a RAND study of pacification in a Vietnamese village.⁽⁶⁾

PEASANTS AS A WAR RESOURCE

The peasants as a class have generally been considered conservative in their outlook, the least likely revolutionaries. Yet, as both

^{*} Emphasis added.

the communist Chinese and Vietnamese have amply demonstrated in the past, the peasants can be molded into a formidable revolutionary force when properly motivated and led. Peasant participation in revolutionary war has ranged from "spontaneous amorphous political action" through "independent class action" to "guided political action."⁽⁵⁾ The first kind of action by the peasants has been known throughout history and is best characterized by its poor record of success. These revolutions, if they may be properly called that, are generally short spurts of undirected energy easily quelled by the central authority. However, more notable throughout history than peasant participation in revolution is the lack of such participation. Undoubtedly many revolts have failed because the revolutionaries were unable to identify with the mass of the peasants, gain control over them, and mobilize them for action.

A more active form of peasant revolutionary activity is the second kind, "independent class action," in which the entire revolution is organized and controlled from within by the peasants. The myth of so-called purely "peasant wars" was revealed by Alroy, who stated, "Determining whether or not an insurrection 'belongs' to the mass of rebels... is particularly difficult in regard to peasant rebels. They are so dependent on the military...skills of outsiders...[that] this notorious weakness of peasant rebels leaves open the question of proprietorship of rebellion."⁽⁷⁾

Currently, the most popular form of peasant participation in revolution is the third kind, "guided political action" or "militarized mass insurrection," which is synonymous with the term preferred here, "revolutionary war." In revolutionary war peasant resources--i.e., supplies, recruits, information, and sanctuary if necessary--are mobilized and organized by an outside elite group. The mobilization of the peasants on a greater than local scale, and especially for an undertaking such as modern revolutionary war, is a tremendously broad and complex endeavor that requires an effective elite organization.

The elite organization in revolutionary war is the hard core of insurgents around which the peasants are gathered for support. This group is characterized not only by its superior organizing methods but also by its ability to involve the mass of the peasants directly in

the war. The organization's success in achieving its goals depends in part on its ability to develop an ideological appeal that is meaningful to the mass of the peasants. Identification with the peasants has permitted the communist leaders of China, the Viet Minh, and the current Viet Cong to develop the necessary peasant support base for revolutionary war.

II. THE PEASANT-INSURGENT RELATIONSHIP: AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Practical experience in South Vietnam suggests that the development of peasant-insurgent relationships is one of the most important and least explored aspects of the war. The present study is an attempt, however primitive, to formulate and describe some of the relationships between the Viet Cong insurgents and the peasant population of rural villages.

STRUCTURING THE PROBLEM

For analytical convenience as well as clarity, the various phases of insurgent activities have been identified and summarized as (1) *recognition*, (2) *adaptation*, (3) *disruption*, (4) *domination*, and (5) *direction*. Although these five suggested phases may seem to be sequential, they are not intended to be a rigid classification system and are not bound to any specific time frame. Since revolutionary war is by nature fluid and ever-changing, the activities appropriate to the different phases of peasant-insurgent relations may be--and often are--carried on simultaneously. Similarly, the insurgents' emphasis on any one objective in any one phase (and the time taken to accomplish it) varies greatly as individual circumstances dictate. The five phases exemplify the types of activities in which the insurgents are engaged at certain times in the course of revolutionary war. The shift from one phase to another generally entails a subtle change of activities rather than a well-defined departure from previous procedures.

The first phase of the peasant-insurgent relationship is *recognition* by the insurgents of conditions or tendencies within the village that may be used to foment insurgency. Recognition of certain village problem conditions--such as excesses and abuses by local government officials, land and tax inequalities, and the lack of opportunity for social and political advancement--necessarily precedes their exploitation by the insurgents. In addition to exploiting these existing conditions in potentially revolutionary villages, the insurgents may also be able to promote latent conditions of insurgency, e.g., by pointing

out to the peasants the deficiencies of the established village government, the implicit consequences of neo-imperialism by other nations by means of foreign aid, and the necessity of developing a firm ideological conviction (guided by the insurgents) to protect peasant interests.

Adaptation refers to the adjustment of the insurgents' techniques and style to the recognized actual or potential preinsurgency conditions in the villages. Insurgent activities during this phase may include the creation of front organizations, the development of localized appeals for support of the insurgency, and the establishment of direct relations with village populations. Whenever such action may be beneficial to their cause, the insurgents may temporarily adapt to or leave undisturbed traditional activities of the village, such as local authority, economic activities, and social customs. At this point, the insurgents aim primarily to insinuate themselves into the rural population, to secure not only support and protection but also a base for later use.

By *disruption* of the traditional patterns of activities in villages, the insurgents attempt to separate the peasants from the established government. Armed guerrilla forces recruited from the villages become active in this phase both to drive out or kill the remaining local officials (thereby removing government presence from villages) and to gain control of the rural population by either voluntary commitment or threats and terror.

When local government defense forces and officials have been removed, the insurgents have achieved *domination* over the village environment, the penultimate step in controlling the peasants. At this time they may substitute their own village administrative apparatus in place of the former government officials. In such a case they may recruit troops and collect taxes, using both for their own support rather than the government's. During this phase of the insurgency, government activity may be limited to destructive military sweeps, which in turn are used as propaganda by the insurgents to further their cause against the government.

The final step in gaining control of rural peasants is the establishment of an environment in which the traditional activities and

resources of the villagers are under the *direction* of the insurgents for the continuing support of revolutionary war. At this stage, former aspects of the village exist only under the direction of the insurgent organization, which pervades village society to the point of complete control.

The foregoing description of the types of events occurring during the phases of the peasant-insurgent relationship is not intended to be exhaustive, but is meant only to serve as a framework for looking at the changes made by the Viet Cong in the traditional village environment of Vietnam during the course of the current insurgency. The Viet Cong themselves use a similar categorization of the process called the "five-step, seven-knot" strategy. The "five steps," which represent the overall revolutionary strategy of the Viet Cong, are the following: (1) reinforce communist organizations in three areas--the communist-controlled, the contested, and the government-controlled; (2) stand firmly on both legs, i.e., consolidate both military and political positions; (3) undertake all-out sabotage of government military installations, communications, and economic centers; (4) pursue a "three-front" offensive: large-scale military offensive, destruction of the national economy, and overthrow of the present government; and (5) reunify the country. The "seven knots," which represent the tactics employed by the insurgents and the rural population for accomplishing the "five steps," are the following: (1) forbid Vietnamese to kill Vietnamese with American weapons; (2) rearm former (anti-French) participants in the Resistance War; (3) stir up hatred among the religious communities; (4) sow division among the anticommunist ranks; (5) institute an economic blockade; (6) strengthen guerrilla cells; (7) fight against imperialist intervention.

A major problem in gaining an understanding of peasant-insurgent relationships in South Vietnam is the obvious difficulty of obtaining adequate first-hand information on the situation in Viet Cong-controlled villages. This problem is particularly acute when the desired information directly concerns the personal relations between the individual peasant and the Viet Cong. Nevertheless, the individual peasant is the best witness to the changes that have occurred in his village as a

result of insurgent activity there; therefore, this Memorandum is based largely upon information collected from 103 interviews with peasants who still lived in, or had just left, Viet Cong-controlled villages at the time of the interview. In addition to this basic data source, supporting materials such as other village interviews, personal observations, unclassified reports, captured documents, and articles from the open press were used to compile this composite picture of the situation in villages under Viet Cong control.

INTERVIEWING THE PEASANT POPULATION

The Interview Sample

The collection of such a body of interviews in the wartime situation in Vietnam presented several unique problems in sampling, interviewing, and analysis, many of which could not be anticipated in the planning of the project and had to be solved in the field. Before the actual interviewing program began, 100 interviews were determined to be an adequate sampling of the average Vietnamese village population, and this number was then divided into ten categories based on the various types of individuals found in rural villages. The sample was deliberately structured to include the appropriate percentages of the various categories of villagers to insure that all types of individuals would be interviewed. The control of the sample to fit the predetermined percentages of village groups obviated random selection. A complete list of the 103 sample interviews, their code number, geographical source, informant description, and a percentage distribution of the interviews by informant categories is given in the Appendix.

Geographical Distribution

The collection of the necessary 100 interviews in a single Viet Cong-controlled village would have presented almost insurmountable security problems. In addition, even if such a sample were obtainable, there was no guarantee that it would be representative of the situation

in other controlled villages. Thus it seemed that an answer to both problems would be to take sample interviews from a variety of locations. The distribution of the villages in which interviews were collected is presented in Fig. 1. Informants from 44 different Viet Cong-controlled villages in three separate major areas of the Mekong Delta were interviewed. Eight villages were sampled in Hau Nghia and Long An provinces in the area west of Saigon. This location was chosen because it bestrides the Viet Cong liaison routes to the Cambodian border and because part of the area is covered by the Plain of Reeds, a well-known Viet Cong base-camp location. Moreover, it was relatively accessible because of its proximity to Saigon.

The cluster of eight villages selected in the populous province of Dinh Tuong was chosen primarily because this province is the base area of the 514th battalion, one of the best known of all Viet Cong main force units. The 7th division, one of the better units of the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN), is also located here and has its headquarters in nearby My Tho, the capital of the province. The remainder of the interview sites were scattered throughout what is known as the Lower Delta, the area of Chuong Thien, Kien Giang, and An Xuyen provinces. The most significant feature of this area for the present purpose is that it contains two main Viet Cong base-camp areas, the flooded U-Minh forest and the mangrove swamps of the lower Ca Mau peninsula. The high level of Viet Cong activity and control in this area has continued virtually uninterrupted in some of the more remote places from 1954 to the present. Another factor that made this area useful for interviewing was the opportunity to seek possible differences in Viet Cong behavior attributable to the relatively long distance from Saigon and the center of GVN control.

Interviewing Technique

The interviewing of informants was usually done by Vietnamese assistants selected not so much for their knowledge of interview techniques as for their thorough acquaintance with the local security situation and local personalities in the various areas, both GVN and Viet

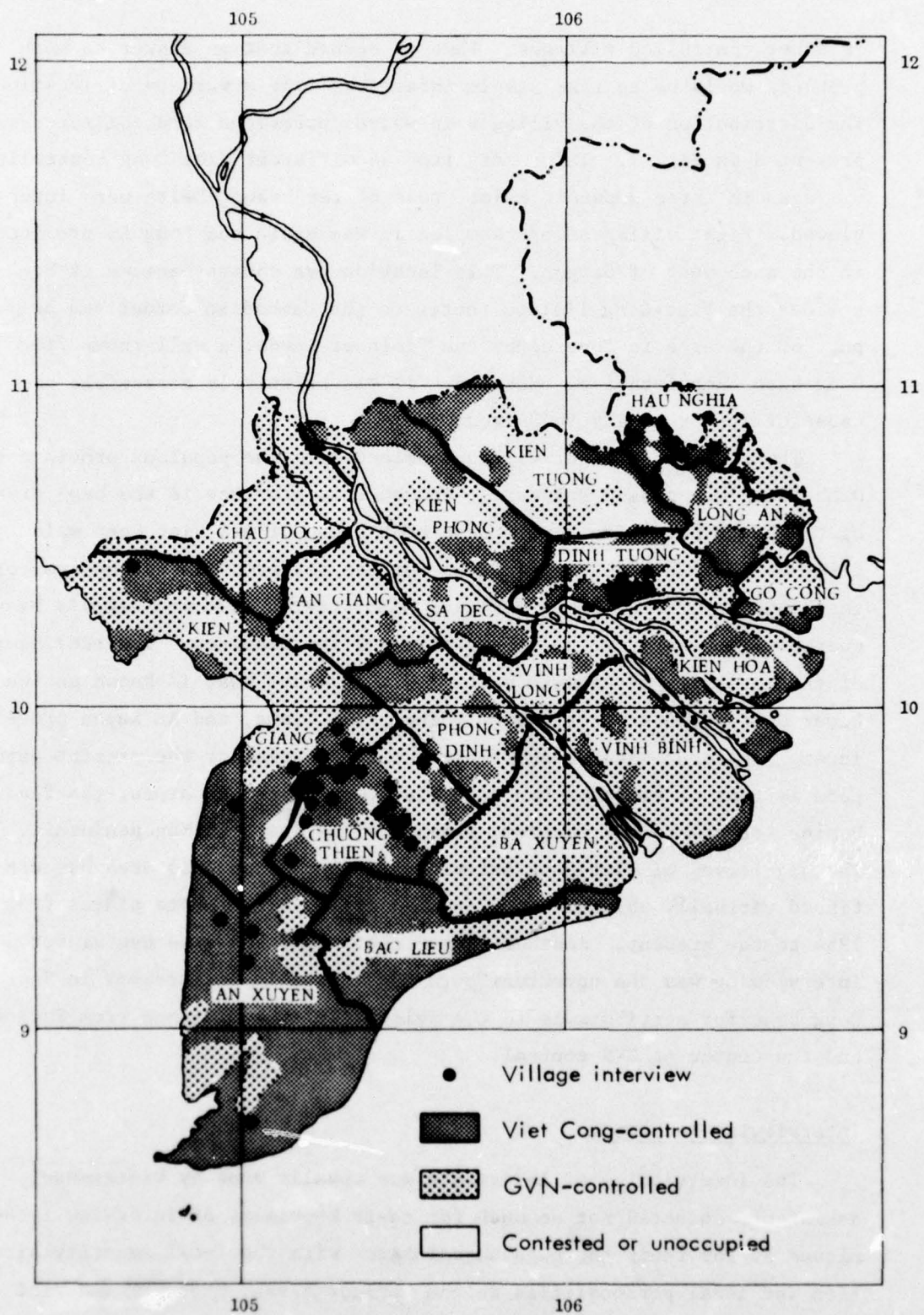


Fig. 1—Mekong Delta, Viet Cong—GVN-Controlled Areas, 1967

Cong. The interviews, conducted in Vietnamese, followed a prepared guide that was continually modified throughout the course of the interview program both to make it a more efficient research tool and to cover as wide a range of relevant topics as possible. All of the 103 completed interviews were recorded on tape, transcribed, and translated into English. As might be expected, the interviews varied in quality and length, owing to a variety of circumstances. Peasant respondents varied from those knowledgeable and willing to answer even the most sensitive questions to those reluctant or unable to discuss even the most general topics. Because the informant was contacted only once to avoid a security risk for both interviewer and informant, the interview guide had to be completely administered at the first meeting; there was no opportunity for repeat interviews with any of the 103 sample villagers who provided complete interviews. Many more than 103 informants were contacted, but incomplete interviews were excluded from the data sample. The interviews usually took from 1 to 4 hours, with the average lasting 1½ hours.

A standard practice was to conceal a small battery-operated tape recorder in a plastic airline bag similar to those found throughout Vietnam. The tape recorder was operated by an on-off switch attached to a microphone which was placed in the bag, or an interviewer's shirt pocket, or some other place where it could effectively pick up the conversation. The distortion on the tape due to outside noises or disturbances was surprisingly minimal, and most of the tapes were clearly understood during transcription. It was concluded that because the tape recorder was concealed, the informant was inclined to speak more freely, especially about sensitive topics such as Viet Cong organization and village activities.*

* Note: The practice of concealing tape recorders described here was inconsistent with The Rand Corporation's policy regarding the conduct of interviews and was discontinued. Other Rand interviews, in so far as is known, were conducted according to the methods described in W. Phillips Davison, User's Guide to The Rand Interviews in Vietnam, R-1024-ARPA, March 1972.

Analytical Procedures

The analysis of the 103 completed interviews included three separate readings. First, the interviews were grouped according to the three major areas from which they were collected, and those from each area were read in turn. The interviews from Hau Nghia and Long An were read to obtain a general picture of the situation in Viet Cong-controlled villages there; the procedure was repeated for the Dinh Tuong and the lower Mekong Delta interviews, where regional differences or similarities were the focus. Next the interviews were grouped by individual villages and read again, with emphasis upon the consistency of the informants' reporting of major trends and events in the same or nearby villages. This reading also served to substantiate any major regional differences in Viet Cong practices noted in the previous reading. Finally, the interviews were grouped into the ten categories of individual villagers and were read again in order to determine how the various villager groups saw the general situation in Viet Cong-controlled villages and what, if any, differences occurred.

Because this analysis emphasized civilian peasants and their view of the war, military and Viet Cong sources (i.e., captured documents and interviews with captured or surrendered personnel) were not consulted extensively. Admittedly, this practice may present some imbalance in a situation in which so much of the war effort is between the Viet Cong and the military, but the omission seems justified if one recalls the major role played by the rural civilian population, especially the peasants, in revolutionary war.

III. THE PREINSURGENT ENVIRONMENT

During the past two decades many fundamental changes have occurred in the villages of Vietnam under the influence of first the Viet Minh and now the Viet Cong. This analysis of these changes begins with a brief look at the preinsurgent environment of the traditional Vietnamese village, a reasonably consistent picture of which emerges from previously published work and the interviews conducted during this study.

THE PEASANT SOCIETY

The Vietnamese peasant, like his brethren throughout Asia, can be summarized in three words: family, subsistence, and subservience. The peasant's family, around which most of his activities revolve, is strongly unified and usually patriarchal. As the basic unit of society, the peasant's family provides the social cooperation necessary for everyday economic pursuits. The peasant is a poor but productive agriculturalist, and his efforts, governed primarily by the cyclic activities in the field, provide him with basic subsistence and relative freedom from fundamental wants. The peasant's economic methods--or rather skills--are traditionally well adapted to the particular task at hand but are otherwise of limited utility.

The peasant's quest for land is universal, but this desire contains the inherent limiting factor of his position vis-à-vis the elite of the social system. Although peasant society itself is virtually classless, the social separation and economic and political disparity between peasants and elite are reflected in the ancient epigram, "Those who earn their living by labor are destined to be ruled." Thus a standard, though romantic, description of the peasantry is "small producers on land who, with the...labor of their families, produce...for their own consumption, and for the fulfillment of their duties to the holders of...power."⁽⁵⁾

The description of the peasant as family-oriented, tied to the land through love and labor, ethnocentric, and politically conservative

may fit the peasant of another era but does not wholly apply to the peasant of the twentieth century, who, although he has clung to many of the traditions which distinguish his particular type of society, has also been exposed to and participated in profound changes in his life, thoughts, and actions.

There is a growing number of another kind of peasant that the romanticist often overlooks, but that the realist cannot ignore. He is the peasant who, feeling the restrictions of his rigid family ties, tries to break the monotony of his daily existence and establish his own personality apart from past traditions. Often, the peasant's attempt at freedom is motivated by the perennial impoverishment of peasant family life, where the fortunes of the individual are frequently determined by the family into which he was born rather than by his own abilities. The impecunious peasant, who is often characterized by his conservative methods of production, may have become quite progressive in his consumption. He has been exposed to modern consumer goods which, although rather modest by the standards of the urban elite, are quite beyond the capabilities of his own rural handicrafts. For the peasant to obtain more income to acquire these newly sought possessions, he must usually acquire more land to farm. But his opportunity to procure more land is severely inhibited by the inequalities of ownership within the community. Fertile land is scarce, and all but the most marginal land is already held by those of high social, economic, or political rank. The social divisions that exist within the peasant's village are based largely on a scale of land ownership; the local holders of power are generally the landed gentry, who have acquired and maintained their position through the acquisition and control of land. Under such circumstances, the peasant society, commonly depicted as stable and conservative, often provides the opportunity for an external group to transform it into a vehicle for change, often through revolution.

But organization is essential if a peasant-based group is to effect change of any sort, even within the local community. Fundamentally, however, peasant society is characterized by the disintegrative forces of the individual and independent family--the antithesis of large-scale

organization. Moreover, the cognatic kinship common in most peasant societies does not of itself give rise to enduring social groups, and beyond the extended family, peasant organization is simple.

THE PEASANT VILLAGE

The village may be thought of as an extension of the primary social group, the family, in a territorial arrangement of social relations. However, the simple definition of a village as a social group inhabiting a common territory does very little to explain the basic similarities which exist between villages not only in a homogeneous area such as the Mekong Delta but also wherever communities called villages are found. The standard measurements of villages, i.e., size, shape, and settlement patterns, not only vary considerably in each community but also have little real comparative value.

Social Activities

The village exists as a necessary locus of certain types of communal activities. Cooperation is the basic social norm of the peasant and is a cornerstone of the village's social structure. While the social activities of the village focus on the family, other activities take place among cooperating families. Social and religious activities such as births, weddings, and deaths are family affairs, but also have their communal aspect.

The scale of religious activities is generally related to the relative prosperity of the village. There is an altar in the individual family dwelling, but religion is also a communal experience. The simple ancestral altar in the peasant's house may be the sum total of his material contribution to religion, but his spiritual practices are nevertheless important in his life. It is important to the peasant to maintain correct social relations, or harmony, with his fellow villagers, and he will often seek guidance from the stars about how to achieve this goal.

Economic Activities

Because agricultural production consumes a greater percentage of the peasant's lifetime efforts than all his other activities combined, he is traditionally obliged to maintain harmony with the elements of nature. Although the technological simplicity of traditional peasant methods of production is a barrier to the introduction of new ideas, these methods have been developed in consonance with the basic social and economic structure of the village. Generations of use have proved them to be an effective means of providing the basic necessities of life.

A positive value of the peasant's relationship with nature is manifested in the spirit of cooperation in the economic activities of the village, such as labor sharing during planting and harvesting. This form of mutual aid is not always voluntary, but it is always necessary. A more general form of village cooperation in which the peasant participates is the village market, which is not only economically necessary but also socially important.

Political Activities

The personal relations between peasants have been described as "a functional reflection of certain structural characteristics of a community,"⁽⁸⁾ which could be interpreted to include relations not only among equals but also among classes. Although peasant society has often been described as classless, within any social group there is some form of authority. Traditionally, the authority in the family is the father; in the village, it is the council of notables or elders.

The members of the village council are usually selected from the landed gentry, usually the wealthier and more influential villagers; therefore, the council is often considered as an elite body in the village, distinct from the common peasants. Membership in the village council is often kept within a few controlling families. The virtual exclusion of the peasant from the village council contributes to the division between peasants and local elite which characterizes the village political system. The village council is the legal authority

in the village political system, and its administration provides the peasant with formal machinery for the solution of community problems. Local disputes of almost any nature are handled by the village council, and only in unusual cases are matters taken outside the village to be settled. The village council also makes the real decisions concerning the inhabitants and activities of the village and serves as the point of contact with higher authorities. Since the political horizon of the peasant generally ends at his village border and his knowledge of what lies beyond is often only a vague notion, he has little understanding of the larger units of the social and political system. Although the village council represents the authority of the national government and handles local problems not of immediate or direct concern to the peasant, he often does not understand or appreciate that fact.

The Myth of Village Autonomy

The peasant's physical and psychic remoteness from the national centers of social and political activity, as well as the vested interests of the local holders of power in maintaining their position within the village, have contributed to the popular misconception of village autonomy. The preinsurgency environment of rural villages in Vietnam provided a good example of this ill-founded idea. Although no classes existed in Vietnamese rural society in the modern sense of the word, there were nevertheless very real social, economic, and political differences among the villagers. Historically, Vietnamese society was divided into four classic groups: *si* (scholars), *nong* (farmers), *cong* (artisans), and *thuong* (merchants). Soldiers, actors, and brigands were all classed together as undesirable.

Education was the achievement most sought after by the Vietnamese, because only with education could one gain the opportunity for examination and appointment as a mandarin; Mandarins were magisterial officials who enjoyed both personal prestige and power. They controlled their domains with autocratic authority, which tended to minimize the influence of the central government in the villages. Only the wealthy, however, could afford the years of schooling necessary to qualify for the

grueling examination; the peasants rarely had the means or the leisure to complete even a moderate education, let alone pass the rigorous examination.

The mandarins as a class were noteworthy for their political conservatism; their hegemony was reinforced by "fence-sitting," the practice of withdrawing from politics rather than risking loss of position.⁽⁹⁾ Interestingly, such political conservatism has generally been attributed solely to the peasants, although it seems clear that their conservatism is more properly seen as a reflection of their leaders' attitudes. French colonization ended the traditional mandarin system, but traditions die hard in rural areas, and through the resistance of the former notables and village leaders a semblance of the old regime lived on under appointed village councils. In the 1940s the French "restored all of their traditional prerogatives to the councils of notables"⁽¹⁰⁾ and although the classical mandarin system had been long abolished, the village councils represented a preservation of that system, at least in their operation if not selection.

One result of this development was the restoration of the old myth of village autonomy. In Vietnamese, this fable is best known in the popular proverb (especially among villagers), "The king's law bows before village custom." What had happened, in reality, was not the preservation of village autonomy but the forced isolation of the villages from the mainstream of Vietnamese society. The peasant's world was indeed his village, and the local authorities intended to keep it that way to preserve their power and prerogatives. Events of the twentieth century, however, were bringing the villages out of their isolation, and the peasants were on the threshold of losing their "non-individualized status within a gregarious traditional community, governed by the council of notables."⁽¹⁰⁾

By 1945 the villages of Vietnam were characterized by an outmoded system of authority based upon privilege and supported by a colonial government that acted to preserve its dominance over the peasants. This was the situation which the Viet Minh faced in 1945 at the beginning of the nine-year *Khang Chien* (Resistance War) against the

French. The Viet Minh capitalized upon the inefficiencies and injustices of the colonial regime and its indigenous extensions in the villages by uniting the peasants under the banner of nationalism to drive the foreigners out of Vietnam. The current second-generation revolutionary war was built upon this foundation.

IV. RECOGNITION: THE SEEDS OF REVOLUTIONARY WAR

The initial activities of an elite organization in revolutionary war are often clothed in obscurity, mainly as a matter of security. It is generally in this early, shadowy phase that the organization's weaknesses are most evident. Because its organizational capabilities are usually undeveloped and its resources insufficient to challenge the central authority in power directly, its activities must perforce remain underground. *Recognition* of its own weaknesses is imperative for continued survival, but recognition of actual or potential weaknesses of the central authority is also necessary to obtain peasant support. During this period the revolutionary ideological base is developed--though perhaps not fully articulated--and is disseminated to the peasants by cadre agents.

According to former Viet Minh activists and present-day Viet Cong^{*} cadres, the planning for the resumption of revolutionary war in South Vietnam began on July 21, 1954, the date of the cease-fire with the French. During the extremely turbulent period immediately following the cease-fire, the Viet Minh organization in the South was left virtually intact and continued to function. In the villages of the South, communist Viet Minh cadres were actively preparing for the regrouping of guerrillas and cadres to the North. Initially, the Viet Minh had apparently planned to send all their troops and political cadres to the North in accordance with the Geneva Agreements. At the last moment, however, the communist leaders in the South decided to send only military troops to the North and to leave behind the political and *Dan Van* (People's Motivation) cadres.

* Viet Cong is the pejorative of *Viet cong-san*, meaning literally "Vietnamese communist," and must be distinguished from Viet Minh (a contraction of *Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi* (League for the Independence of Vietnam)), which is generally used to describe both participants and organization in the *Khang Chien* against the French, 1945-54. The term Viet Cong came into popular use by the Vietnamese press as early as 1956 to distinguish between communist and noncommunist Viet Minh.

Although the communist-dominated Viet Minh had secured only half the country as a result of the Resistance War, they were confident of the eventual reunification of Vietnam under their control. In order to counteract any loss of morale among those who were left in the South, the Viet Minh used the slogan "Going North is a glory, but remaining behind is also a glory." The policy of *Tap Ket* (going North) was disseminated to all Viet Minh units during the course of *Hoc Tap* (study) sessions. The number of regroupees per southern village varied from a few to several score. It appears that the regroupees were selected mainly for their potential as subversive agents in the South, which was estimated from their activities during the Resistance War and the location of their village. Even with the regrouping to the North of more than 800,000 Viet Minh and their dependents, an estimated force of 10,000 cadres and guerrillas was left in the South to provide a formidable resource for future subversion. (11)

PERMANENT INFILTRATION BY UNDERGROUND CADRES

After the completion of the regrouping to the North, the remaining cadres in the South carried out activities known as *truong ky mai phuc* (permanent infiltration). Specially selected *can bo nam vung* (underground cadres popularly known as "sleeping cadres") were to return to their villages and either resume their former occupations or immediately engage in underground work for the Viet Minh organization. One of the main tasks of the underground cadres was to explain to the peasants why the Viet Minh had to wait 24 months after the cease-fire for the reunification plebiscite to take place. Pending the plebiscite, the underground cadres advised the peasants that they should keep the land that the Viet Minh redistributed to them during the Resistance War and not give it back to the government or the former owners.

The peasants' reaction to the activities of the underground cadres in the villages appears to have been mixed; some expressed awareness and even cautious approval of their activities, while others professed complete ignorance. The underground cadres attempted to remain as close as possible to the peasants in order to shield their activities

from the GVN officials who began to return to many rural areas after 1954. One of the simplest methods used by the underground cadres for gaining the confidence of the peasants was to contact former Viet Minh guerrillas in the village and be introduced by them into the village. Because the achievements of the Viet Minh guerrillas were still fresh in many peasants' minds, the cadres were also generally successful in relating their activities to the Resistance War against the French.

POLITICAL FRONT ORGANIZATIONS

During the permanent infiltration into villages the underground cadres followed the well-known communist strategy of concealing a weak position by seeking cover through legitimate fronts or political parties, activities which were consistent with the preparations for the reunification plebiscite through "legitimate" actions. During the Resistance War the communists had dissolved the Viet Minh organization and formed the *Hoi Lien Quoc Dan Viet* (National Popular Front Association), commonly called the Lien Viet. The underground cadres in the South who were Communist Party members used the Lien Viet primarily as a means of extending their influence in the villages without readily exposing themselves to detection by the GVN. In 1955 the *Mat Tran To Quoc* (Fatherland Front) was created by Ho Chi Minh "for legal activities in the North and underground activities in the South."⁽¹²⁾ Although it is doubtful if the latter purpose of the Fatherland Front was announced publicly at that time, it was apparently formed to agitate for the reunification plebiscite, which was to be held in July 1956. It is surmised that the Viet Minh in the South hoped to gain a majority of the reunification votes, which in turn would almost certainly result in the selection of Ho Chi Minh as the leader of a unified Vietnam.

Although most political activities in the South were centered in Saigon, some of the more intellectually inclined peasants not only were aware of such activities, but actually took part in them. Probably the best-known noncommunist political party in the villages before 1954 was the *Dang Dan Chu* (Democratic Party). Several political organizations in Vietnam have been called the Democratic Party, but only two

are relevant here. The noncommunist Democratic Party was founded in 1936-37 by the late Dr. Nguyen van Thinh and was originally a moderate political party aimed at accommodation with the French. The *Dang Dan Chu Mien Nam Viet Nam* (Democratic Party of South Vietnam) is a communist front organized in 1960 within the NLF; it maintains close ties with the Vietnam Democratic Party, which was formed in 1944 in Hanoi by a group of nationalists and still exists there.

The welter of names and organizations associated with the earlier Resistance War was confusing to the peasants; they frequently confused new organizations created after the cease-fire with old ones from before it. According to the interviews, the peasants identified the underground cadres with several organizations and were understandably confused as to which organization was in fact active in the villages. An example of a local underground organization in the Ca Mau peninsula of the Mekong Delta was *Cao-Thien-Hoa-Binh*, a united front representing the major political-religious sects in the delta: the Cao Dai, Thien-Chúa (Catholics), Hoa Hao, and Binh Xuyen.

POLITICAL-RELIGIOUS SECTS

In addition to creating fronts or political alliances, the underground cadres were also busy infiltrating the major political-religious groups in the South. Two of the most important sects were the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai. The Hoa Hao, with an estimated two million members, is the larger of the two; its main area of influence is An Giang and Chau Doc provinces in the western Mekong Delta. Founded prior to World War II, the Hoa Hao is a reformist Buddhist sect whose spiritual leader was killed by communist Viet Minh in 1947. Since that time the sect has been strongly anticommunist. However, the sect's aversion to communism was of little advantage to the struggling government of Ngo Dinh Diem, because it maintained a large army and demanded autonomy for those provinces in which Hoa Hao members formed a majority of the population.

The Cao Dai religion was founded in 1925 and claims more than one million followers. It is a syncretism of reformed Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, with a hierarchy that has a Pope and both Western

(Jeanne d'Arc, Victor Hugo) and Eastern (Sun Yat Sen) saints. The original center of Cao Dai activity was in the city of Tay Ninh. However, internal convulsions of the religious movement in the 1930s split the Cao Dai into several sects dispersed throughout the Mekong Delta, which helped disseminate Cao Dai doctrine and influence. The various Cao Dai splinter groups were unified under a Viet Minh front organization during the Resistance War, but the union was not very successful because the Cao Dai, like the Hoa Hao, had a standing army and sought independence from the central government.

A third group opposing Diem was the Binh Xuyen. Neither a political organization nor a religious sect, the Binh Xuyen was primarily a group of river pirates who controlled much of the gambling, prostitution, and smuggling in Saigon and who also had a well-equipped army which was a formidable opposition force to Diem.

In those areas of the delta where it had maintained suzerainty during the Resistance War, the Hoa Hao was much feared because of its brutal methods of dealing with nonmembers. Immediately after the 1954 cease-fire the Hoa Hao army began to occupy several provinces outside its centers of influence. Although the Hoa Hao had generally supported the French during the Resistance War and therefore was supposedly an enemy of the Viet Minh, its opposition to Diem resulted in a partnership with the underground cadres in the South. Because the cadres were considerably weaker than the Hoa Hao forces, an alliance with the sect was fashioned within the framework of the Fatherland Front.

THE FAILURE TO HOLD THE 1956 PLEBISCITE

Although the point is difficult to substantiate, it appears from the interviews that the underground Viet Minh organization in the South was confident of gaining reunification in the 1956 plebiscite through its alliance with the sects in the Fatherland Front. Two events occurred, however, that completely reversed the situation and caused a major change in the cadres' tactics. First, the uneasy alliance between the underground Viet Minh organization and the sects ended with Diem's defeat of the Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Binh Xuyen

through a combination of military victories and masterful political intrigue. Second, Diem refused to enter into the scheduled discussions intended to lead to the 1956 plebiscite. Several circumstances contributed to this unexpected move: Diem's military defeat of the sects' armies, the growing political consolidation of his regime, and increased support from abroad, mainly from the United States.

The failure of the Diem government to support the reunification plebiscite was seized upon by the underground Viet Minh as the *raison d'être* for revolution. Perhaps equally important, the acknowledged reason for the existence of the Fatherland Front was also destroyed, and the underground cadres were thus deprived of their political cover. They almost immediately suspended their secret activities in the villages and began an overt propaganda barrage aimed at discrediting the Diem regime for not holding the plebiscite.

Initially, the propaganda tasks fell to the cadres who had been living in the villages since 1954; because many of them returned to their native villages after the Resistance War, they were known and accepted by the local peasants. The propaganda methods of the underground cadres usually involved direct contact between agent and audience, such as whispering to peasants during a village celebration or work session. The direct, personal nature of the propaganda used by the underground cadres was easily understood by the peasants. Normally, the propaganda was aimed at creating confusion and distrust of the government among the peasants. Underground cadres repeatedly used such terms as "the family-operated government of the Diem regime." In addition, Diem was portrayed as a traitor for not having held the reunification plebiscite desired by the people.

The underground cadres often also made the point that the return of the Viet Minh was necessary to continue their revolution, which had been betrayed by the Diem government. Special targets of this propaganda campaign were the former guerrillas who had left the Viet Minh and returned to their villages. These ex-Viet Minh formed a dormant corps of potential cadres, and the underground cadres constantly made reference to their past achievements during the Resistance War as a means of gaining their support and participation. Moreover, many of

the former Viet Minh were local heroes, and their approval of or association with the underground cadres often persuaded the peasants to follow suit.

A good example of propaganda used by the underground cadres at that time concerns the national flag of South Vietnam. Because this was the flag used by the provisional government created by the French during the Resistance War in order to attract noncommunist Vietnamese away from the Viet Minh, the Viet Minh charged the Diem regime with colonialism. The cadres contended that, on the other hand, the flag of North Vietnam (a yellow star on a red background) truly represented the Vietnamese people, since the five points of the star represented the five classes of Vietnamese (scholars, farmers, workers, merchants, and soldiers) and the red background represented the bloodshed of the revolution.

GVN REACTION TO THE UNDERGROUND CADRES

It appears that the Diem government was aware of the growing threat in the villages; it undertook several actions in Saigon which had a profound effect upon both the peasants and the cadres. In the autumn of 1955, Diem had been established as the first president of the Republic of Vietnam through the national referendum deposing Bao Dai. Elections for a National Constituent Assembly in the spring of 1956 further consolidated his power. Yet by late 1956 it was apparent that the government still faced many internal problems. Jumper commented that "the government of South Vietnam, despite its demonstrated ability to repress the military-religious sects, still faces a real threat from the Communists who continue to have considerable strength among some sections of the Southern people, especially the peasantry."⁽¹³⁾

Among the first of Diem's efforts to counter the increased activities of the underground cadres was the imposition of strict regulations upon the remaining families of the Viet Minh who had been removed to the North. In addition, Diem attempted to strengthen his control in the rural areas through the reorganization of the village administration. The traditional village councils of eleven members were replaced in 1956 by three government-appointed officials.

This direct interference by the national government in village affairs, which had occurred only occasionally even under the French colonial regime, was resented strongly by the peasants. They particularly resented both the interference of the government in the traditional (albeit unequal) methods of selecting village council members and the poor quality of the appointed officials themselves, who in many cases were selected not because of their administrative ability but because of their connections with the canton, district, or province chief (in extreme cases village chiefs were allegedly appointed directly from the presidential palace in Saigon). The subsequent behavior of the officials toward the peasants further exacerbated the declining government position in the villages. Peasant criticism of the village officials' behavior was almost endless, with charges ranging from bribery and extortion to cruelty and inefficiency. The peasants claimed that the government officials in the villages acted like "civil bosses rather than civil servants."

Probably the most damaging consequence of the village officials' misbehavior was that it drove the peasants farther away from the government rather than closer to it, which in turn had the effect of closing off the information furnished by the peasants to the government on the activities of the underground cadres in the villages. One of the main problems facing GVN officials was that the cadres camouflaged themselves among the peasants for protection.

In areas where the village officials were informed about and active against the underground cadres the response varied, depending upon the strength of the government militia forces and the number of cadres. On occasion the ARVN combined with local militia units in an attempt to capture the cadres or at least disrupt their activities. More often than not, however, the highly mobile cadres were given enough advance warning to move or hide among the peasants and escape capture.

Nonetheless, the increase in GVN political control in certain rural areas forced many cadres to move to more remote, secure areas where they had less contact with the peasants. Also, the increased strength and efficiency of some GVN security and intelligence organizations proved a hindrance to the cadres. Often they were forced to

conduct their activities at night or even cease them altogether. Rather than imperil their chances for future success by acting prematurely, many underground cadres chose strategic retreat in the face of the demonstrated superiority of the government. This was consistent with the recognition phase of the peasant-insurgent relationship, when the cadres' activities ebb and flow according to their weaknesses and strengths. The reality of the situation in South Vietnam at that time was corroborated by Jumper's observation that

In South Vietnam, the Communists have taken the measure of the central regime's firmness. Indicative of this recognition is the following excerpt from a Communist radio broadcast beamed to South Vietnam: "Revolutionary uprisings must be guided scientifically...If it is too windy, the captain must turn his sails so that the ship will not be upset...In other words, one should contain oneself before a temporarily superior enemy..."⁽¹⁴⁾

From 1954 to 1957, it had become gradually apparent to the Diem government that the activities of the underground cadres in the villages, which continued notwithstanding the GVN military victories over the sects and political consolidation of the regime, posed a definite security threat. Although the main activities of the cadres were confined to organizing peasants and propaganda, the existence of a latent corps of experienced revolutionaries among the former Viet Minh living in the rural areas was a cause for concern. Unfortunately, it appears from the peasants' own recollections that the insensitive methods of suppression used by the government often directly affected the peasants adversely without appreciably curtailing the cadres' activities. The government was investing in a policy of oppression from which it would derive little future return.

V. ADAPTATION: THE COMMITMENT TO REVOLUTION

An evolving revolutionary elite organization, especially during the early phase of its activities, is likely to be weak and relatively disorganized in comparison with the central authority. Eventually, however, the organization must arrive at the *adaptation* phase, i.e., the formulation of goals suitable to a particular environment and within the organization's power to achieve. Circumstances may sometimes require that, despite its recognized weaknesses, the elite organization increase its activities to take advantage of special situations which may or may not be of its own making. In this case the activities of the organization may be perforce advanced into the adaptation phase even though it is simultaneously engaged in underground activities and not fully prepared for overt action according to its own criteria and procedures. In either event, the shift to the adaptation phase of activities is extremely important; it is a critical and vulnerable transition that, if successful, is a prelude to future more overt, forceful action. The more open actions of the underground cadres make them more vulnerable to detection and destruction by the central authority. Now, the elite organization fully commits itself to the course of revolution. Metaphorically speaking, the captain has set the sails of the revolutionary ship and its course is charted.

After 1957, the activities of the underground cadres in South Vietnam increased at different rates due to a variety of circumstances, such as cadre strength, location of former Viet Minh base areas, remoteness from GVN influence, and behavior of local GVN officials. The peasants generally agreed that the main period of expansion into overt cadre activities was between 1958 and 1960. Although the GVN was much stronger than the insurgents, its own poorly planned and implemented programs of resettlement and land reform provided considerable motivation for the increase of revolutionary activities in the South. Repressive measures taken against former Viet Minh guerrillas and their families also contributed significantly to the alienation of the Diem regime from the peasants. The underground cadres took advantage of these circumstances and began to work more openly among the peasants.

THE THREE TOGETHERS (TAM CUNG)

To gain the confidence and eventual support of the peasants, the cadres adopted a Viet Minh principle known as *tam cung* (literally, "three together," i.e., work together, eat together, live together). The purpose of *tam cung* was to insinuate the cadres among the peasants both for protection and for constant contact. The peasants thus contacted by the cadres naturally became propaganda targets for the support of, and for recruitment into, the war. *Tam cung* was a particularly useful technique for allowing those cadres who could not work in their home village to go elsewhere and carry on their activities. The cadres assisted the peasants with daily work and thus gained their confidence; they were then often invited to eat with or even stay with the family. In this manner the cadres could help support themselves when they were assigned to a new village and at the same time maintain continuous close contact with the peasants. The cadres' contribution to the peasants' welfare and livelihood gradually resulted in their acceptance into the village, at which time they were able to exploit the peasants for their own ends.

In keeping with Vietnamese respect for elders and other venerable members of the village, the cadres usually began by approaching the elders of a family, thus adapting to acknowledged authority figures in order to use them to their own advantage. An even more expedient method of gaining acceptance was to use influential villagers as a means of introduction to the peasants to give the impression that the notables of the community approved and supported the cadres' activities. Village elders were especially valuable for influencing youth to support the cadres, and they were often used indirectly for recruiting purposes. However, the cadres' tactics remained flexible to take advantage of any opportunity to secure the sympathy and support of any group in the village, even if another important but less useful group would be alienated thereby. For example, because the cadres sought the support of the landless peasants who made up the majority of the village populations, they would often side with the tenants in disagreements with the landlords.

The propaganda used by the cadres was as varied as their target audiences. Although the spoken word was the most widely used early propaganda medium, posters and leaflets were also provided which contained promises designed to appeal to the various peasant groups living in the villages. For the poor and landless peasants the cadres spoke of land redistribution and a rise in the standard of living, while propaganda for the educated or wealthier peasants often consisted of discussions about the evils of the government and the threat of a new form of colonialism posed by cooperation with foreigners. The cadres promised to bring about equality and liberty as well as rice for everyone when the government was deposed and the imperialists driven out. Usually, the promises were so general that they would have been difficult to dispute under any circumstances.

GUERRILLA RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

Whereas propaganda provided the revolutionary "voice" of the cadres, the revolution developed organizational "muscle" only with the recruitment and training of guerrillas, which often followed the initial overt appearance of the cadres in a village. According to our informants, the cadres apparently first concentrated on bringing into the revolutionary organization their former Viet Minh comrades who had not remained active after the cease-fire. The secondary target of the recruiting appears to have been young men between 18 and 25; many of these were too young to have actively participated as fighters in the Resistance War, but they had heard tales about the exploits of the Viet Minh. The number of youth joining the guerrillas in the early days of the insurgency varied in each village; however, according to respondents from areas of active cadre recruitment, the average number of guerrillas per village was between 10 and 20.

Initially, overt guerrilla activities were restricted primarily because of the lack of weapons. The weapons shortage was such that guerrillas sometimes had to resort to training with wooden rifles painted black. However, some weapons were available from caches buried at the end of the Resistance War, and some were stolen from government

outposts. The local manufacture of weapons also appears to have been quite extensive. The guerrillas not only improvised weapons but also employed a variety of means to make their numbers appear greater than they actually were. One such method was to march a small group of guerrillas noisily through a village at night; the next day the cadres would exaggerate the number of troops who had passed by in the dark. Because of their vulnerability to the better armed ARVN, the guerrillas often remained in remote areas of the villages for security. On occasion the cadres would use their "ghost troops," as the guerrillas were called, for supporting their activities in villages.

FARMERS' ASSOCIATION (NONG HOI)

The recruitment and training of guerrillas was the first step toward establishing a revolutionary organization in the villages. Although the cadres were still weak in comparison with the rural GVN civil and military organizations, in some areas they nonetheless proceeded to create popular associations for gaining additional peasant support. The virtually unhampered growth of cadre organizational activities in many areas of South Vietnam was due mainly to the lack of government officials, most of whom were in district towns or isolated outposts. The lack of an organized and functioning rural constabulary or paramilitary equivalent also allowed the cadres to work unimpeded in many villages. As long as the government was not informed of the cadres' presence in the villages, they could work effectively to create popular associations and other revolutionary organizations.

One of the largest, most important, and most enduring of the popular associations of the revolutionary war in South Vietnam was the *Nong Hoi*, one of the earliest activities designed primarily to involve the average peasant directly in the revolutionary war against the GVN. Regardless of when the *Nong Hoi* was established in a village, it almost always followed the standard organizing technique of the cell. Normally the *Nong Hoi* cell was composed of one leader and two or more peasant members. The actual number of participants in early *Nong Hoi* cells varied from three to twelve, but the *tam tam che*, or three-person cell, was the most common.

The key to gaining the peasants' support was to control their primary activity--agricultural production. By adapting their village-level organization to the peasants' mode of economic production, the revolutionary cadres were in a position to influence and control the peasants' only means of existence. Moreover, some of the peasants' agricultural production was necessary to support the war, and therefore control of economic activities insured a constant source of supply while simultaneously denying that supply to the GVN.

The functional link between the *Nong Hoi* and *tam cung* was one of the basic foundations of revolutionary war in Vietnam. Although the peasants were mobilized and organized for revolution through the *Nong Hoi*, it was through *tam cung* that the cadres actually gained the necessary personal respect of the peasants.

The recruiting of guerrillas and the establishment of the *Nong Hoi* by cadres placed greater support requirements upon the peasants than during the period of permanent infiltration, when the cadres were largely self-supporting. By means of the *Nong Hoi*, and occasionally with the help of the guerrillas, the cadres began to channel peasant support for the war more efficiently. Initially, peasant support was in the form of paddy or (infrequently) cash, and during the early periods of activity in the villages it was called a contribution rather than a tax. Judging from peasant responses, there appears to have been no set pattern as to when the cadres actually began to collect the contributions; it usually depended upon the sympathy and rapport each cadre had been able to build up in the village in which he was working.

Our informants report that the development of peasant support proceeded slowly at first in those areas in which the GVN had some form of presence or influence. But in areas more remote from GVN influence, which often were centers of antigovernment activity primarily because of their inaccessibility and distance from population centers, revolutionary activities were more numerous, and the cadres generally worked unhindered. Finally, when they began to make gains among the peasants in areas under nominal government influence and even to make armed forays into those areas, the GVN began to appreciate the magnitude of the threat.

FURTHER GVN REACTION

Up to this point, the ineffectiveness of the GVN in identifying the revolutionary cadres and disrupting their increased activities had enabled the cadres to survive among the peasants. It was difficult for the GVN to positively identify individuals as cadres rather than peasant sympathizers or active supporters of the revolutionary cadres. The GVN record in this critical matter had been poor and its counteractivity often indiscriminate. Moreover, the initial activities by the GVN were generally carried out by inexperienced soldiers whose harsh and arrogant actions alienated the peasants and more than offset the gains produced by the elimination of a few cadres. The cadres naturally were quick to use the misbehavior of ARVN soldiers as propaganda against the government.

Law 10/59

According to the peasants interviewed, one of the GVN's most serious mistakes in attempting to uncover and remove the cadres from the villages was the promulgation of Law No. 10 in 1959. This now celebrated law was the highlight of the 1957-60 "denunciation of Communism" campaign instituted by Diem. Under Law 10/59 anyone convicted of "acts of sabotage or infringements of national security" would be sentenced to death or life imprisonment, with no appeal.

In a sense, Law 10/59 was an unlimited hunting license for the GVN. The government became the sole interpreter of subversive activity in Vietnam and could choose its targets with impunity. At least initially, the primary targets were all former Viet Minh guerrillas, regardless of whether they were known to have been participating in revolutionary activity at the time. The insensitive implementation of Law 10/59 alienated Diem from the peasants even further. The communists quite naturally seized upon Law 10/59 as a propaganda plum, exploiting its distasteful aspects to the fullest (one example being an English-language publication by the Foreign Languages Publishing House in Hanoi, titled *Fascist Terror in South Vietnam: Law 10/59*).

The Agrovillage Program

About the same time as the promulgation of Law 10/59, the Diem regime embarked upon the Agrovillage program. Known to the Vietnamese peasants as *khu tru mat* (literally, fertile zone), the Agrovillage might be considered as a far-distant relative of the Soviet collective farm or the Chinese commune, and was meant to be a compromise between the two characteristically distinct poles of Vietnamese society, the urban centers and the rural villages.⁽¹⁵⁾ Because the Agrovillages were to be placed in strategic locations on or near principal transportation routes, the agricultural production of the residents could be moved easily to consumption centers. In return for living and producing in the Agrovillages, the members would be provided with such benefits as electricity, water, and educational and health facilities. The major unspoken purpose of the Agrovillage, of course, was to shield the peasants from the influence of the revolutionary cadres and deny the cadres peasant support.

Two major disadvantages were immediately obvious to the voluntary or involuntary participants in the Agrovillage program. First, the peasants themselves were to supply the labor without direct compensation, a device closely resembling the much-hated *corvée* labor system of former imperial Vietnam. Second, many participating peasants had to leave their homes (in many cases ancestral villages) and relocate in the Agrovillages.

The conscription of peasants to work on the Agrovillages, coupled with the continually overbearing and corrupt behavior of local village officials, produced even greater peasant disenchantment with the Diem regime, and the harsh and arbitrary methods employed by officials to exact peasant labor further exacerbated the deteriorating relations between the peasants and local officials. In characteristic fashion, the peasants placed the immediate blame for the forced labor and harsh treatment on the village officials. The revolutionary cadres in Agrovillage areas propagandized constantly against the program and even set about destroying Agrovillages.

If the Agrovillage program had been implemented less zealously in some areas, perhaps it might have had a chance to provide real benefit

to those who participated in it. However, the insensitivity of low-level GVN officials to the increasing protest of the peasants, coupled with the active countermeasures organized by the revolutionary cadres, prematurely sounded the death knell of the Agrovillage program.

In considering the events, then, it is apparent that the revolutionary cadres adapted quickly to opportunities presented by the indiscriminate repressive activities of the government. This was reflected in the open development of the revolutionary organization in the villages through the creation of popular associations and other means to enmesh the peasants in revolutionary war. Further GVN repression through ill-conceived programs such as Law 10/59 served only to aid the revolutionary organization in turning the peasants against the government.

VI. DISRUPTION: SUBVERSION BY FORCE

When a revolutionary organization undertakes extensive and continuous overt activities against the central government, it has advanced into the phase of *disruption*. The disruptive activities of the revolutionary cadres have two distinct purposes, the first of which is open confrontation with government representatives and consequent elimination of them in selected areas by means of armed attacks against government military forces and terrorization of government administrative officials in the village. Village officials who are either unpopular with the peasantry or especially effective in countering the insurgents' propaganda and activities are singled out as targets. Second, the cadres effectively disrupt the traditional activities of the peasants themselves as a prelude to taking control of the village. Traditional social, economic, or political institutions and activities which may be detrimental to the revolutionary cause are especially favored targets. By openly attacking government forces and agencies and covertly undermining the village social system, the revolutionary cadres work toward separating the peasantry from the government in order to gain control over them and their resources.

THE ORIGINS OF THE NLF

As we have seen, revolutionary cadres had been engaged in subversive activities against the GVN as early as 1956-57. However, it was not until the official announcement of the formation of the *Mat Tran Giai Phong Mien Nam Viet Nam* (National Liberation Front of South Vietnam) on December 20, 1960, that the revolutionary activities of the numerous cadres in the South came under the leadership of a single organization. The NLF has been depicted both as a genuine, internally organized indigenous movement and as an external organization conceived and controlled by the communist government of North Vietnam. The important questions of the background and origins of the NLF are already the subject of a growing literature ranging from government "white papers" to books and articles arguing either the NLF dependence on or its independence from communist North Vietnam. As might be expected, the

communist bloc supports the theory that the NLF is an organization created within South Vietnam. One of their long-term spokesmen and apologists who has travelled inside "the liberated zone of South Vietnam" has written glowing dispatches about the guerrillas, who "as always, belong to the soil and the villages they are defending."⁽¹⁶⁾ Conversely, Douglas Pike, a leading authority on the development of the NLF, argues that "the creation of the NLF was an accomplishment of such skill, precision and refinement that when one thinks of who the master planner must have been, only one name comes to mind: Vietnam's organizational genius, Ho Chi Minh."⁽⁴⁾ Actually, the NLF is probably a combination of the two, i.e., a response to the genuine grievances of certain sectors of the population of South Vietnam which for the most part was organized and controlled through a complex system of front organizations directly linked to the communist government of North Vietnam.

Perhaps a more important question about the origins of the NLF as an elite revolutionary organization concerns the peasants' role in its development. Most existing discussions of the evolution of the NLF have tended to ignore the importance of the peasants, either because substantial data were thought unobtainable or because the peasants were considered insignificant compared to the cadres and their organizational methods. Although it might be reasonable to expect some difficulties in obtaining relevant data from a population directly involved in the war, the significance of the peasants' relationship to the NLF cannot be dismissed lightly. It can be argued that in revolutionary war the peasants are merely the pawns of the elite organization, unquestioningly submitting to the demands made upon them and silently withstanding the hardships of war. At the present level of conflict in South Vietnam this conclusion may be partially correct, but it leaves unanswered the important question of the peasants' early acceptance and support of the NLF when that organization was still relatively weak and almost solely dependent for survival upon peasant succor and sanctuary.

Because underground cadres had been actively engaged in subversive activities against the GVN since 1956 or even earlier, the actual announcement of the establishment of the NLF in the villages was almost

anticlimactic. To some, the NLF was meaningless, while others understood quite well the reasons for the revolutionary organization in their midst. The announcement of the formation of the NLF in the villages varied from clandestine reports to ceremonial occasions. In villages under GVN control or those contested with the government, rumors were spread about a front that had been organized to liberate the peasants from the second bondage of the Americans and the Diem regime. In the more remote villages, the cadres organized celebrations to announce to the peasants the creation of the NLF. It was reported that in some particularly inaccessible areas the cadres even installed gasoline generators to provide lights for the announcement ceremony.

The two major justifications given by the insurgents for the formation of the NLF were (1) Diem's failure to hold the reunification plebiscite scheduled for 1956 and (2) the increased intervention of the United States in South Vietnam. For propaganda purposes, the NLF cadres deliberately aligned themselves with the former Viet Minh, who had been persecuted by the government, in order to capitalize upon the anticolonial spirit built up among the peasants during the Resistance War. The cadres constantly tried to relate the NLF to more familiar former organizations like the Fatherland Front, Lien Viet, Viet Minh, and so forth. The more perceptive peasants saw the relationship between the NLF and the Viet Minh as being "the same play on the same stage."

As might be expected, peasant reaction to the announcement of the formation of the NLF varied, but it appears that there was no widespread fear about the cadres nor concern about how the GVN might react. Apparently, the peasants were curious about the new name of the NLF. Adverse peasant reaction to cadres openly working in their villages was generally avoided because the NLF often used local cadres who had previously worked in the area and were known by the population. Cadre behavior was reported to be polite and friendly--even intimate--toward the peasants. Peasants who disapproved or were afraid of the NLF appear to have been a minority in most villages.

DISRUPTION OF GVN INFLUENCE IN THE VILLAGES

The announcement of the formation of the NLF marked an increase in village activities aimed at removing GVN control and influence. One of the first steps taken by the NLF cadres and guerrillas was armed attacks on GVN military and civilian agencies and their installations. Although guerrilla-type ambushes and harassments had continued without interruption from 1954 to 1960, they were often isolated incidents not directly connected with a general revolutionary movement. Now, however, the NLF began to control and coordinate these efforts.

In addition, the obvious weaknesses of the previously separated guerrilla units had precluded meaningful military activity against GVN forces and outposts. The tactics of the NLF guerrillas in isolating and attacking a village outpost followed standard guerrilla-warfare techniques, but most guerrilla units were too weak to succeed in overrunning an outpost. In comparison with the GVN forces, the guerrillas were weak not only in numbers but also in weapons. Some NLF guerrillas were armed with nothing more than machetes or a few homemade grenades. The poor quality of the early guerrilla weapons was indicative of the high number of locally manufactured arms (frequently called "independence rifles").

The guerrillas did not concentrate wholly on attacking GVN outposts and watchtowers, but also struck at lines of communication like roads and bridges. Unprotected government buildings also were targets, and many land development offices, health stations, and similar structures were destroyed.

The guerrillas also followed a practice used earlier by the Viet Minh called *tru gian diet ki* (elimination of traitors), especially seeking out those village officials known to be cruel, corrupt, or inefficient. The main purpose for the elimination of village officials appears to have been to make possible the substitution of NLF control for GVN influence. If the guerrillas could not succeed in killing the village officials, they sought to isolate them from the peasants, warning the peasants not to recognize the village council members or deal with them. The village officials retreated into government outposts for security and thus had less and less frequent contact with the

peasants. The elimination of the unarmed village officials generally followed the standard guerrilla practice known as "cutting off the branches before felling the tree."

The problem confronting local village officials--beyond that of simple survival--was how to continue working at their tasks. The hamlet chiefs who remained in their small, unprotected hamlets were the most vulnerable, and many of these lowest level government officials lost their lives. A standard practice employed by the guerrillas was to gather the peasants in the hamlet, produce a file on the intended victim, and read out his crimes, either real or false. Usually, the official was killed, although in some cases he escaped with a severe beating intended to humiliate him in front of the peasants. NLF cadres exploited such killings for maximum propaganda effect, pointing out to the peasants that the guerrillas had rid them of a major source of their problems.

The NLF cadres and guerrillas attempted to disrupt virtually every aspect of government activity in the villages. During national election campaigns the NLF cadres went to the peasants' houses, telling them not to participate in the election of a National Assembly, which was nothing but a puppet body set up by Diem. If peasants did attempt to vote, guerrillas were often stationed on the way to the polling places to intimidate them and coerce them into returning to their villages.

As with the elections, the NLF cadres attempted to destroy another visible sign of government influence by confiscating both the GVN census lists compiled in the villages and the plastic identification cards issued to all Vietnamese over the age of 18, claiming that the ID cards were the last vestiges of slavery and had to be destroyed. The destruction of government ID cards served the NLF a double purpose. First, it aided in concealing the identity of the cadres and guerrillas in the villages; obviously, if no one had an ID card, it would be difficult to separate cadre from peasant. Second, many cadres altered the cards for their own purposes, e.g., using them to infiltrate into GVN areas. A less obvious advantage to the NLF from the destruction of the cards was that GVN officials often treated peasants without ID cards as sympathizers

or supporters of the insurgents, when in fact they might not have been. Thus, the various NLF actions were steadily separating the peasants from government control, which made it even easier for the cadres to penetrate the peasant mass in order to gain their support for the war.

NLF PROCEDURES

Persuasion

The emergence of the NLF in 1960 did not signal a radical departure of cadre activities in the villages from those of the previous underground period; rather, many previously successful practices were continued and applied even more intensively. One such practice was *tam cung*, which had been of vital importance for the initial establishment of cadres in the villages. When NLF guerrilla forces began small-scale military activities against the GVN, it was more imperative than ever that the peasants provide them with support and security. *Tam cung* allowed the guerrillas to live in villages during military activities without placing too heavy a burden on the local population. The guerrillas would hide their arms when entering a village and assist the peasants in their daily tasks in order to earn a meal and sometimes a place to stay. Moreover, as before, *tam cung* allowed the guerrillas to maintain close personal contact with the peasants and to disseminate NLF propaganda on a friendly, face-to-face basis.

As the activities of the guerrillas increased, the need for more and larger units increased proportionately. After 1960 the NLF began organizing permanent village guerrilla units on a wide scale to meet the increasing military requirements of the war. Usually the village guerrilla units began as small platoons, sometimes composed of 20 to 30 volunteers. Because they were often poorly armed and trained, they were usually used more frequently to support local cadre activities than to conduct military operations against the GVN. Nonetheless, their continued existence indicated the growing strength of the NLF in the villages.

The *tam cung* technique also played an important role in the expansion of activities of other NLF organizations such as the *Nong Hoi*.

After 1960 the *Nong Hoi* began to seem more and more an integrated part of the NLF organization. *Nong Hoi* cadres worked directly with the peasants to increase production to meet the needs of the revolution. During meals the *Nong Hoi* cadres would discuss the importance of the peasants' role in supporting the NLF and try to encourage them to work harder and more efficiently. The direct cadre-peasant relationship allowed the cadres to learn the attitudes and outlook of the peasants for future exploitation by the NLF.

The *Nong Hoi* had many duties in addition to increasing peasant production. At this stage of the war, members of the *Nong Hoi* actually assisted the families of men in the guerrilla units with their agricultural tasks. *Nong Hoi* cadres also worked with peasants to develop a concept of cooperation among themselves and the NLF. In addition, the *Nong Hoi* purported to represent the peasants' interests in such matters as tenancy rates, wages, and so forth. It was apparent to many peasants that the *Nong Hoi* organization not only played a key role in agricultural matters but was also an important arm of the NLF in policy matters.

Classification of Peasants

The *Nong Hoi* was also used to gather peasants together for special *Hoc Tap* sessions, during which NLF policies were promulgated. *Hoc Tap* sessions were conducted for a variety of purposes, including propaganda, recruitment, taxation, and peasant classification. As with many NLF practices, precedent for peasant classification was set by the Viet Minh during the Resistance War. The NLF used the same four classes as the Viet Minh: *dia chu* (landowner), *phu nong* (rich peasant), *trung nong* (middle-class peasant), and *ban co nong* (poor or landless peasant).

The actual classification process usually began with a gathering of the peasants in the village. Cadres organized the peasants into groups according to the amount of land and property each owned. Each group underwent a propaganda session in which their group's role in the revolution was explained. The landless peasants were usually extolled by the cadres as being the hard-core elements of the revolution, while the rich peasants and landowners were told they needed to reform

their thinking in order to contribute to the revolution. The classification almost immediately allowed the cadres to develop a sense of class distinction among the heretofore classless peasants. The landless peasants were incited by the cadres to demand redress from the landowners for previous injustices such as high rents and rates of interest.

Terrorism

To supplement their persuasive campaign through *Hoc Tap* and peasant classification, the NLF cadres in villages employed selective and purposive terror, which for the present purpose is defined as encompassing "the act or threat of violence, the emotional reaction, and the social effects."⁽¹⁷⁾ A distinction must be made between terror and intimidation or coercion. A peasant who expresses fear at the sight of an armed guerrilla in his village is not terrorized; he is intimidated and may thereby be coerced to perform an act he would not generally do under normal circumstances. If, however, the guerrilla were to use his weapon on the peasant himself or on another peasant in view of the individual, the act would certainly produce terror.

The process of terrorization is a method whereby an organized group, such as revolutionary cadres, seeks to achieve certain aims through the systematic use of violence. The purpose of the NLF cadres' terrorization against the peasants appears to have been twofold: first, to eliminate a particular social group (the traditional rural authority, whether village officials or landowners), and second, to control a larger social group, the peasants. By aiming specifically at eliminating or reducing drastically the influence of the traditional ruling group in the rural villages and substituting its own form of control, the NLF sought to dominate the peasants without having to use overt terrorization of them. NLF cadres also resorted to the elimination of selected victims through public trials attended by the entire village population, who would often participate in the sentence. Normally, a public (or people's) trial began with the arraignment of the victim before a gathering of the peasants. A presiding cadre would read the charges against the victim and ask the peasants for a verdict. NLF cadres planted in the gathering

often would shout "kill," and the peasants would respond likewise. Usually the sentence was carried out summarily. Before a victim was brought to public trial, he had almost assuredly been tried secretly and found guilty by NLF cadres; the peasants were merely accomplices in a prearranged drama. The peasants' involvement by implication in the trial and sentence of local village officials was a deliberate attempt by the NLF cadres to involve the peasants in the revolution. Whether or not the peasants agreed with the verdict is difficult to judge because they usually kept such thoughts to themselves. Most of them avoided discussing such incidents, saying merely "only the Sky knows if it was just."

Although the killing of village officials had a noticeable effect on the peasants' behavior, the full effects of the NLF terror were not felt in the villages until the peasants themselves became targets. Initially, the cadres sought the support of virtually every group in the village who could assist them, with the possible exception of landlords and village officials. However, the classification of the peasants not long after the emergence of the NLF produced a major change in the village.

Apparently NLF terrorization directed against the peasants was undertaken slowly, selectively, and effectively. If the cadres failed to build up sympathy and support among some of the more influential peasants, they often resorted to intimidation and outright violence to persuade the peasants to change their attitudes. It appears that the selection of those to be killed was based upon (1) their real or potential threat to the NLF and (2) whether or not the killing would be viewed with approval by the peasants; for example, the cadres murdered particularly hated notables or elders to demonstrate how they punished reactionaries. A common practice borrowed from the Viet Minh was to stick the sentence of the accused on his shirt before killing him. Usually, the victim was called *Viet gian*, or Vietnamese traitor, which even today is considered an extreme form of invective. The reaction of the peasants to such acts was usually frightened silence.

Finally, a necessary element in the process of terrorization is a population or target audience whose great fear renders it incapable of

reaction. The cadres had created an emotional environment in the villages in which the normal forms of interaction between the peasants, and particularly any form of organized opposition to NLF terror, were suppressed. Even when one member of a family had been killed by the NLF, there appears to have been little reaction by the remaining relatives. Peasant prudence in avoiding confrontation with the NLF cadres was expressed simply by the remark "Obedience is a trouble-free remedy these days."

Taxation and Land Redistribution

Generally it was not until after the cadres had applied selective terror in a village that the peasants became compliant to the point of supporting the revolution. The subtle use of intimidation before and after acts of violence is perhaps best seen in the tax collection methods employed by cadres in the villages. Prior to the emergence of the NLF, cadres collected "contributions" to support the guerrillas. After 1960 the pretense of voluntary contributions was abandoned and the levies became compulsory taxes. Because the amount initially collected from the peasants was relatively small, the cadres had little trouble supporting themselves. If any peasants were reluctant to "contribute," then a show of guerrilla force or a selected act of terror usually convinced even the most recalcitrant individual.

The division between peasant groups in the villages created by the classification not only aided the cadres in tax collection but also provided a basis for land redistribution. After the classification in a village, cadres could determine how much land was available for redistribution to the landless peasants. Because the NLF did not have full control in most villages of South Vietnam at that time, a preliminary local land redistribution was often undertaken in lieu of a full-scale land reform. This form of redistribution also fit in more closely with the disruptive nature of NLF activities in villages during that period.

Preliminary land redistribution usually began with a *Hoc Tap* for each of the peasant classes to explain the purpose and method of the measure. The *Hoc Tap* for the landless peasants was called *tuyen chon*

(selection), while the middle-class peasants attended a *giao duc tu tuong* (indoctrination) session. The landowner's *Hoc Tap* was called *cai tao tu tuong va khai thac* (reindoctrination and exploitation).

The actual redistribution of land was often handled by the *Nong Hoi* cadres in a village. Initially, the land that had been redistributed to peasants by the Viet Minh was given back to them by the NLF. This was the simplest form of redistribution, since the pattern established earlier in most villages had remained unchanged. Land belonging to owners who had not returned to the village after 1954 or who had fled after 1960 was also redistributed to landless peasants. These simple redistribution methods were consistent with the undeveloped administrative capabilities of the NLF, which was incapable of handling a large-scale reform program at that time.

Recruiting

Another contribution of the peasant classification was to assist the NLF in recruiting new guerrillas and cadres. To sustain an increasing level of activity and to expand into other GVN-controlled areas, the NLF had to undertake an intensive recruiting campaign. Cadres employed a "carrot-and-stick" approach to peasants, suggesting that since they had received land from the NLF they should express their gratitude by joining the guerrillas. As a result, the landless peasants provided a large part of the recruits for the NLF. The other peasant classes were considered marginal in their genuine support of the NLF, since usually they were the ones at whose expense land had been redistributed.

The heavy emphasis placed upon recruiting landless peasants helped create the notion that only two classes existed in villages, the landless and the landowners. The landless peasants were portrayed as the only group capable of the revolutionary leadership necessary to lead the struggle against the GVN to victory. The recruiting of guerrillas was now much more extensive than the previous effort, when only former Viet Minh and some youth were selected. After 1960 the cadres resorted to a variety of recruiting methods in an effort to build up the NLF

guerrilla forces rapidly. Cadres sought to indoctrinate landless peasants and youth in the virtues of becoming a guerrilla and often employed the Vietnamese saying, "With a rifle under his arm he likes to have his chin up." Women cadres were also used in recruiting youth into the guerrillas; it appears that female recruiters were especially effective in pointing out the NLF's view of the youths' duty.

The subtlety employed by the cadres in recruiting included several ploys designed to play upon the sympathies of the peasants. Cadres would stage a ceremony in a village in which a peasant or guerrilla had been killed by the GVN and demand of the crowd that his soul be commemorated by offers to join the NLF. Peasant youths would be exhorted to step forward and replace their comrades who had already volunteered for the NLF forces and had sacrificed their lives. Another subtle technique used by cadres was to leave a rifle and ammunition in a peasant's house and ask him to take care of the weapon until they could return for it. If the peasant was reluctant, the cadres would reply that many people in the village complied with such requests. The cadres were fairly certain that the natural curiosity of youth would lead to interest in the weapon. The final step in the process took place when the cadres returned for the rifle but after suitable soul-searching told the youth to keep it for self-defense in case he met ARVN soldiers in the village. Unknowingly, the youth had become a guerrilla and had become committed to the NLF.

Alienation From Tradition

The social disruption attendant upon NLF activities in villages is probably best seen in the changes that occurred in the traditional family ties. It appears that the NLF tried to alienate the peasant not only from the GVN but also from his heritage. The new ideas that were introduced into the villages by the cadres were attractive to young people and especially to landless peasants. Because the youths had had to forego schooling in order to work and help their families, many peasants blamed their acceptance of these ideas on lack of education. The influence of the cadres upon the youth of the villages also contributed considerably to their disrespect for parents and elders,

which most peasants blamed on the cadres' propaganda and indoctrination. The NLF urged the youths to think about the nation first, because if the nation was lost, then their homes and families would also be lost. To further emphasize the cleavage between old and new, the NLF sent young cadres to talk to the village youths.

The social disruption was especially noticeable within the families of NLF cadres. Cadres seldom stayed with their families, who relied upon neighbors to assist them with the necessary activities to earn a living. Their own security needs prompted cadres to renounce any family ties in order to avoid the possibility of GVN reprisal or compromise. The NLF also maintained that a cadre could perform his task more efficiently without family ties to hinder him.

Religion was another traditional unifying social practice of the peasants that came under attack. The methods used by NLF cadres to disrupt village religious activities were seen by many peasants merely as a continuation of a practice begun earlier by the Viet Minh. The link between the Viet Minh and the NLF in this regard was manifested in the activities of the cadres, who had been working for more than 20 years to reshape the minds of the peasants. Cadres paid particular attention to the religiously inclined peasant and tried to persuade him that religion was nothing but superstition imported and fostered by the imperialists to lull the peasants and paralyze their resistance activities.

The practicalities of establishing a working relationship with the peasants apparently mitigated cadre actions in attacking religion in the villages, although certainly the precedent had been set for the use of terror. Rather than actually forbidding religion and attendance at church or pagoda, the cadres infiltrated the religious groups in villages, attempting to urge the leader to side with the NLF. If this failed, cadres often criticized religion and caused many peasants to give up open practice of their religious beliefs.

The cadres' attempts to disrupt religious activities were not confined to formal religions such as Buddhism or Catholicism; they also attacked the peasants' animist beliefs. Ancestor worship was criticized as being too expensive for the peasants; they were urged to reduce the

celebrations to a minimum in order to conserve their resources for the revolution. The veneration of village spirits and the use of certain superstitious rituals in curing illnesses were also criticized by the cadres.

Family celebrations such as weddings or anniversaries also came under scrutiny of the cadres, who reproved the expense of these ceremonies. Cadres would often attend ceremonies uninvited and then find reasons to criticize them. The veiled threat of the cadres' presence was more than a nuisance factor, and the restrictions on holding traditional ceremonies reduced the peasants' enjoyment of such gatherings. The loss of one of the few sources of pleasure in the peasants' rather dull lives was often deeply resented.

The cadres' attempts to limit the traditional social activities in the villages extended even to common practices such as money-lending and gambling. Traditionally, a tenant might borrow money from his landlord, a relative, or moneylender in the village to carry him through the period before his rice was harvested, when he would repay it--often at usurious rates. NLF cadres forbade moneylending on the grounds that it led to the exploitation of the poor by the rich. Vietnamese are almost compulsive gamblers; young and old alike delight in playing cards or Chinese chess, or lagging coins. On the pretext that if a person lost money, he might have to rob someone else to live, the NLF cadres forbade gambling, thereby depriving the peasants of another of their few forms of entertainment.

PEASANT DEMONSTRATIONS AND GVN REACTION

The increase in armed attacks against government outposts, offices, and administrative personnel effectively reduced GVN presence in many areas of South Vietnam. Most village officials who remained in areas where the NLF was active were forced to live and work in outposts, which automatically divorced them from a large proportion of the peasant population. Administrative services and other forms of government activity were often ineffective or nonexistent because of the growing insecurity of the rural areas.

In many areas the only remaining GVN representatives were military personnel. The peasants living in the more remote villages were in turn subjected to another form of terror by ARVN artillery, mortar, and sometimes air attacks. When force was met with force, the peasant population was caught in the middle. Government military operations were often limited to sweeps through villages where NLF cadres were active in hopes of capturing the local revolutionary organization. Owing to superior intelligence, the NLF cadres usually avoided these sweeps. But the presence and actions of military forces further disrupted peasant activities in the villages, and the usual misbehavior of ARVN soldiers during such operations contributed to the government's image as exploiting and mistreating the peasants.

Fully consistent with their purpose of disrupting all government activities, NLF cadres organized peasant demonstrations ("political struggle") against the GVN. These were rarely voluntary expressions of peasant aversion to the activities of the GVN and ARVN, but rather they were planned and organized by the NLF to further separate the peasants from the government and to present an image of spontaneous peasant protest against ARVN military operations in the villages. The cadre organizers of the demonstrations against ARVN military operations would often use clever ruses to disguise the purpose of the peasant gatherings, or parents of GVN soldiers could be ordered to march at the head of the demonstration to deter ARVN reaction. On some occasions the peasant demonstrators asked the GVN to raise the soldiers' salaries so that they would stop stealing chickens and pigs during a sweeping operation.

Unfortunately, all too often the GVN reaction to the demonstrations was to break them up with force and arrest some of the peasants; on more than one occasion local government officials fired upon the crowds of peasants. Cadres took immediate advantage of such situations to propagandize among the peasants and point out that the GVN was not interested in their problems and complaints.

As was shown in this section, the formation of the NLF signalled a move from a fragmented, localized threat to the GVN to a centrally directed pattern of revolutionary activity. The NLF cadres in the villages continued to work more openly to build the confidence of the

peasants and to develop embryonic population control measures. The introduction of systematic terrorization marked a radical departure from previous practices of gaining peasant support through persuasion and sympathy. Several social changes were also initiated, such as the creation of class divisions and the breakdown of family and other personal relations in the villages. The essence of NLF activities was to create a situation wherein the complete disruption of government and traditional activities in the villages would leave the way open for the establishment of revolutionary control.

VII. DOMINATION: THE PROCESS OF LIBERATION

When the disruption of government control and traditional activities in rural villages is virtually completed, the phase of *domination* has begun. During this phase the revolutionary cadres have gained a clear measure of ascendancy over the peasants, although not necessarily complete control. Domination, in this sense, may be defined as "a form of interaction in which the superior [i.e., the revolutionary organization] generally acts so as to make the subordinate [the peasant population] react...but in a manner chosen by the superior."⁽¹⁷⁾ The relations between the revolutionary organization and the peasant population can now be defined as the degree to which the peasants' actions are controlled by the revolutionary cadres. Institutional forms of control associated with domination are developed by the revolutionary organization to fill the vacuum created by the disruption and to complete the destruction of the former government administrative structure. Other forms of control are manifest in popular associations created by the revolutionary organization. Finally, the degree of insurgent control in rural villages is such that the amount of independence allowed the peasant population is severely limited.

VILLAGE LIBERATION

The removal of GVN authority from a village marked the achievement of NLF domination over the peasants, or "liberation" in the communist lexicon. In some areas a transition occurred between the GVN departure and NLF takeover; these villages were termed "contested," i.e., neither the GVN nor the NLF was in control. The actual liberation of a village was usually the result of an attack or repeated attacks upon the local government outposts, which were then abandoned. During the last convulsive phase of the liberation process a village often suffered damage from attacks by both the ARVN and NLF guerrillas. After the destruction caused by liberation, the cadres apparently worked hard to convince the peasants that the village was finally free and that they could now move about without fear of further oppression or interference from the GVN. Nevertheless, the liberation of a village did

not necessarily signal an immediate and radical change in either the lives of the peasants or the activities of the cadres there. Rather, it marked an intensification and expansion of previous activities undertaken by the NLF.

NLF ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

Specialized Popular Associations

Village liberation and the removal of all GVN officials brought the NLF the immediate task of taking over and running the vacated village administration. NLF administration of a liberated village was designed to achieve two simultaneous goals: first to control the village population, and second to maximize each individual's contribution toward the war. The *Nong Hoi* often functioned as a mechanism through which the transition from a GVN to an NLF administration was accomplished with a minimum of problems. As discussed earlier, in preliberation villages the *Nong Hoi* was usually the main administrative tool of the NLF, and its cadres were often responsible for administrative tasks as well as their other duties.

In the long run, however, the operation of a liberated village was made the responsibility of an NLF board of administration ostensibly made up of several committeemen, each in charge of a specific activity in the village, such as security, finance, military affairs, propaganda, and so forth. A chairman, vice-chairman, and general secretary presided over the board and made the major decisions concerning administrative matters. Although a single universal description of an NLF village board of administration is an oversimplification, an idealized version of such a body is presented in Fig. 2. All the functions that exist in a fully organized village are shown in the figure, although all positions were rarely filled in a single village. Two or more positions could be filled by a single member, and in some cases the village administrative board structure does not contain slots for every official shown on the figure. The confusion is compounded because peasants often referred to the same position by different titles. What is important about the NLF village board of administration is its

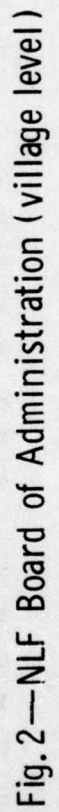


Fig. 2—NLF Board of Administration (village level)

pervasiveness: functions and positions were created to cover virtually every type of peasant activity in a village.

The members of the permanent affairs committee were responsible for the actual administration and control of a liberated village. The committeeman for military affairs may also have been the head of the village guerrilla unit. In addition to the continual task of recruiting for the village guerrilla force, the village military affairs committeeman was responsible for maintaining contact with families who had relatives in ARVN to persuade them to leave and join the NLF. This practice was called *binh van*, a term composed of the words *binh* (military) and *van* (civilian); it covered all NLF proselyting activities.

The security affairs committeeman was in effect the eyes and ears of the liberated village. He was in charge of the intelligence network in the village, which was often formed from members of the popular associations. Security affairs also involved the detention and interrogation of suspected outsiders who entered the village. Internal village security, which consisted of the investigation and interrogation of peasants suspected of antirevolutionary activity (e.g., working for the GVN or not supporting the NLF) was also a responsibility of the security affairs committeeman.

The economic and financial affairs committeeman was in charge of all village funds. His task was to record the income of each person in the village and determine the tax to be collected accordingly. This committeeman also determined the village expenses and established a village budget. If extra expenditures were needed for some unforeseen purpose, then extra contributions from the villagers were collected by cadres of the economic and financial committee.

The social affairs committee covered a wide range of village activities not directly under the other committees. The propaganda and indoctrination subcommittee was in charge of all *Hoc Tap* courses held in the village. In addition, specialized propaganda sessions for military, security, or economic affairs were also held. Education of the children in a liberated village was handled by cadres of the education subcommittee.

The lowest echelon of administrative activity in a liberated village was carried on by the hamlet cadres, who were often called *can-su* (manager) by the peasants. The *can-su* formed a direct link between the individual peasant and the village board of administration in a manner not unlike the relationship between the hamlet chief and the village council in GVN areas. The duties of the *can-su* were to solve the peasant's problems in the hamlets and to seek assistance if necessary from the board of administration.

The establishment of the NLF board of administration was an important step in the organization of a liberated village. It was at this point that NLF "organizational theory came starkly against reality."⁽⁴⁾ Under the traditional authority of the mandarins, the leadership in rural Vietnamese villages had been strong, but not necessarily politically oriented. The advent of the NLF village administration utilized what residual authority still existed in the villages or changed it to fit the more rigid political purposes of mobilization and organization of peasants for revolutionary war.

After an administrative board had been appointed by higher level NLF authorities and was operating in a liberated village, it held executive meetings at least once or twice a month. The agenda of the meetings covered all fields of activity in the village, ranging from military affairs to social action. An analysis and discussion of the monthly work was undertaken to draw conclusions and set down guidelines for the coming month.

Besides the closed meetings of the board of administration, *dai hoi* (big meetings) for the whole village were also frequently held. During these meetings cadres lectured the peasants on the NLF's activities against the Diem government and its American allies. They usually reported on the progress of the war in all areas of the South, on the number of battles won, and on the political situation in the North. Sometimes the lectures concerned the purpose of taxes and the reasons for fighting a revolutionary war.

Specialized Popular Associations

The NLF purpose of involving the peasants more directly in the war was a primary motive for the creation of specialized popular associations in the village. The pattern of organizational techniques used by the NLF during the early stages of the war bore a striking resemblance to the activities of the Viet Minh at a similar stage in the Resistance War. For example, the NLF cadres, like their Viet Minh predecessors, used the cell extensively as an organizing unit. As a contemporary observer of the Viet Minh, Mus wrote the following comment in 1949 which was still directly applicable in 1960:

Traditional rural society contained a multitude of specialized social groups...In certain aspects the "revolutionary" front imitates the traditional structure of society by proliferating groups, not only of workers, soldiers and peasants, according to the hallowed formula, but also of women, children, old people, merchants, former soldiers, and the like. These associations originated as a network of cells, an aspect which they will not easily shed as long as the war continues.⁽¹⁰⁾

The cell was widely used by the cadres as a means of maintaining close contact with the peasants in order to indoctrinate them. It was especially important in the development of the *Thanh Lao* (Labor Youth), which was a political organization used as a training ground for future NLF cadres and ultimately Communist Party members. Membership in the *Thanh Lao* was more selective than any other popular association; only youth, and particularly those from landless peasant families, were considered as potential members. The contributions of youth in revolutionary war are generally accepted as important and necessary, since they often serve as the main source of recruits for the guerrilla forces as well as for the cadre corps.

The *Thanh Lao* was the end product of several youth associations and, like many other NLF organizations, had Viet Minh predecessors in the Resistance War. An early forerunner of the *Thanh Lao* was the *Thanh Nien Tien Phong* (Vanguard Youth), which later became the *Thanh Nien Cuu Quoc* (Salvation Youth). Another youth organization reported to have existed in the villages was the *Thanh Nien Tiep Can Dang* (Youth Next to the Party). The immediate predecessor of the *Thanh Lao* in most

liberated villages was the *Hai Lien Hiep Thanh Nien Giai Phong* (Liberation Youth Association), a popular association open to all youth. Outstanding members of the Liberation Youth were selected after a period of testing for entrance into the *Thanh Lao*.

The *Thanh Lao* was especially important to the NLF because it often undertook the most dangerous or onerous tasks, such as intelligence, sabotage, and terror. The multiplicity of tasks assigned to *Thanh Lao* members often required the creation of suborganizations. Within the major organization, there were subdivisions such as *Thanh Nien Tu Ve* (Self-Defense Youth) and *Thanh Nien Tien Tuyen* (Front Line Youth). All members of the *Thanh Lao* had three basic duties: (1) steadfastness in the struggle for the revolution, (2) strict obedience to orders from higher authorities, and (3) willingness to sacrifice oneself for the revolution.

Apart from the *Thanh Lao*, the cadres organized several other popular associations within the NLF constituted according to sex, age, or occupation. The actual number of popular associations formed in a single liberated village was difficult to determine because different names were often used for the same group. However, classification of popular associations in liberated villages even with these three criteria was often difficult.

The main female organization in the villages was the *Hoi Lien Hiep Phu Nu Giai Phong* (Liberation Women's Association), which was also known as *Lien Hiep Phu Nu* (Women's Association), *Thanh Nu* (Young Women) or *Phu Nu* (Women). In addition to the Liberation Women's Association, there were other specialized women's groups. Two with the same task were the "Mothers of Combatants" and "Sisters of Combatants." Women in these associations entertained the guerrillas when they returned from battle and assisted in recruiting for the military forces.

A more general youth association than the *Thanh Lao* was the *Thanh Nien Giai Phong*. A special subgroup based on age within the Liberation Youth Association was the *Hoi Thieu Nhi Giai Phong* (Liberation Adolescent Association). These youth associations assisted in various tasks in liberated villages and entertained guerrillas with theatrical performances and singing.

The NLF did not overlook children in the war. They were organized into the *Hoi Nhi Dong Giai Phong* (Liberation Children's Association) and used for special tasks such as scouting, spying on the ARVN, and watching peasant activities in liberated villages. Because children were less suspect than adults or teenagers, they were also used as secret messengers.

At the other end of the age scale were specialized associations for village elders, Veteran Resistants, and other such peasant groups. Although their material contribution to the NLF was probably minimal, nonetheless the organization of the older peasants was consistent with the NLF's purpose of involving virtually everyone in a liberated village in the war.

An important function of the popular association was to gather the peasants together for the periodic *Hoc Tap* sessions conducted by cadres of the board of administration. While their frequency varied with the season, the *Hoc Tap* meetings occurred about once a month, although one could be called at any time in special situations or emergencies. Virtually everyone in the village had to attend a *Hoc Tap* of one form or another on a regular basis.

Normally, a *Hoc Tap* would entail a lecture by a cadre, followed by group discussions, criticisms, and conclusions. Subjects of the *Hoc Tap* ranged from the duties of a citizen living in a liberated village to the achievements of the NLF. A single subject could be discussed during several consecutive sessions lasting many weeks. The "Duty of Liberation" *Hoc Tap*, for example, covered many topics, such as what the peasants were supposed to do during an ARVN sweeping operation and why peasants should remain in the liberated areas rather than going to the GVN-controlled zones. The peasants were consistently encouraged to increase their production in order to provide more support for the NLF guerrilla forces.

The endless repetition of the *Hoc Tap* sessions became an accepted feature of the peasants' lives in liberated villages. The sessions were organized so that there was no need for the peasants, many of whom were illiterate, to take notes or use reading material; the cadre instructors were careful to repeat the theme over and over until each peasant could remember it.

When ARVN military actions in a liberated area increased, the gathering of peasants for *Hoc Tap* sessions became more dangerous. In order to avoid detection and yet still maintain the *Hoc Tap* sessions, the NLF cadres resorted to a variety of measures. Meetings were held at night in remote areas of the jungle, or groups were reduced to about twelve peasants so they could meet inside a house. The cadres overlooked no possibilities for concealing the *Hoc Tap* sessions from ARVN detection. Peasants reported that they met in rice granaries, temples, pagodas, and even in the tombs of deceased ancestors. These extreme efforts seem to indicate the vital importance the NLF placed upon maintaining the *Hoc Tap* sessions not only for disseminating their propaganda but also for maintaining control of the peasant population.

Economic Affairs

To sustain guerrilla military operations against ARVN on an ever-widening scale, the NLF had to increase the support given by the peasants to the military forces, which in turn meant tighter control of their agricultural production. A large share of the responsibility for obtaining the increased support fell to the *Nong Hoi*. Although the main function of the *Nong Hoi* was to control the agricultural production of the peasants and to channel the product to the NLF, it was also directly involved in several other aspects of economic organization and activities in liberated villages, such as rent reduction, labor exchange, and land redistribution. The activities of the *Nong Hoi* also had an important political dimension; it served as the basic link between the economic and political policies of the NLF in the village. Through *Hoc Tap*, members of the *Nong Hoi* were taught the importance of the peasants' role in the struggle for social justice against the enemies of the revolution. Landless peasants were given the leading role in the struggle because they had suffered the most at the hands of the landowners.

Nong Hoi members were organized for cooperative agricultural work in order to increase production. Cadres stressed the mutual help of *Nong Hoi* members, especially necessary during emergencies. Because

increased ARVN sweeps and air strikes made the stored paddy of the peasants extremely vulnerable, safe storage of that vital commodity became an important *Nong Hoi* responsibility. Special subcommittees were set up to hide the paddy in a village and protect it from confiscation or destruction by ARVN.

Land Redistribution. Because the *Nong Hoi* had maintained continual close contact with the peasants on the matter of land and agricultural production, its role in the redistribution of land in a liberated village was especially critical. Land redistribution in a liberated village was vastly different from the preliminary redistribution undertaken earlier during the disruption phase of activities. Under the NLF board of administration and the *Nong Hoi*, land redistribution was part of the overall plan in which everyone was to have land to till.

A major problem confronting the NLF was how to redistribute land equitably to the peasants. A simple initial procedure was to return to the peasants the land that had been previously redistributed to them by the Viet Minh. If the landowners had returned to the villages after 1954 to claim their land, their property was expropriated again and redistributed. However, once the land of the large or absentee owners was confiscated and redistributed, the NLF still had to expropriate the smaller owners who remained in the village to provide sufficient land for further redistribution. In accordance with the NLF policy of adjusting land ownership and income according to the individual's needs, the cadres took land from those peasants who could not cultivate all they owned. Generally, it was the few remaining rich or middle-class peasants in the villages who held land in excess of their immediate family needs. Rather than merely confiscate land, the cadres tried to employ a peasant landowner who was sympathetic to the NLF to volunteer his land for redistribution as an example for others to follow. He was then hailed as a patriot who was ready to sacrifice personal interests for the revolution.

The redistribution process varied in liberated villages, depending on the amount of land available. Whereas the Viet Minh redistributed

land to peasants according to the number of members in a family, the NLF allotted land arbitrarily with no set pattern. The amount of land redistributed to an individual peasant varied, depending upon quality, accessibility, and crop yield. In areas where the land was of marginal fertility, the NLF redistributed as much as ten or twenty hectares per family. In densely populated areas, the average share was as small as five *cong** or less.

There were some inequities in the NLF redistribution policy which did not escape the peasants. Cadres were accused of redistributing fertile land to their families and the poorer land to the peasants. Other peasants complained that the families of guerrillas or cadres received priority in the redistribution process. Although many peasants were dissatisfied with the land redistribution, however, they were virtually powerless to change the situation.

Tax Collection. As with most NLF practices, tax collection began with a *Hoc Tap* to explain the necessity of the peasants' contributions. Cadres lectured about the need for "self-awakening" in order to mobilize the patriotism of the peasants against the *Diem-My* (Diem-Americans). After the *Hoc Tap* cadres had classified the peasants according to the amount of land they cultivated, a tax scale was fixed according to the production rate of the land in the village. The rate of the tax, called the agricultural tax, increased progressively with the quality and yield of the land. For example, one village classification might include categories ranging from 200 *gia*** per hectare to 50 *gia* per hectare, with various levels in between. On occasion *Nong Hoi* cadres would purposely overestimate the yield of the land in order to obtain more tax for the NLF.

The general practice by which the land and yield estimations were made, called *binh san luong* (leveling of income), was consistent with

* A *cong* is a Vietnamese measure equivalent to the amount of land one man can work in one day. Approximately ten *cong* equal one hectare (2.47 acres).

** A *gia* is a bulk measure of rice which equals approximately 40 liters.

the NLF policy of reorganizing village society through the equalization of land ownership and income. The implementation of *binh san luong* in liberated villages raised the economic position of the majority of landless peasants moderately and lowered the landowner's position drastically.

The agricultural tax, an annual tax levied on each producing peasant family, was the most commonly collected and the most important tax. Before paying the tax, the head of the family was allowed a subsistence deduction for each member of the family plus a small surplus for so-called general expenditures. The remainder of the peasant's income was then taxable. Depending upon the fixed tax scale, a peasant may have had to pay from 10 to 50 percent of his total annual income, although an average amount appears to have been approximately 30 percent.

A good deal of confusion existed about the types and scales of tax paid by the peasants, mostly owing to the variety of names used for the basic agricultural tax. Various peasants have reported paying the *dam phu quoc phong* (national defense tax), the *dam phu Khang Chien* (troop support tax), or the *dam phu mat tran* (tax for the Front). All of these names refer to the agricultural tax.

Another tax commonly collected from the peasants was the *thue nhap thi* (market entrance tax). This tax was collected from peasants taking goods out of a liberated village to sell in town as well as from itinerant merchants who moved in and out of liberated zones selling necessary items to the peasants. Although it was basically the same tax, the merchants called it *hang chuyen* (loading of goods). The market entrance tax amounted to about 15 percent of the value of goods to be sold and had to be paid before the peasant was allowed to move his merchandise to town. The purpose of the market entrance tax appears twofold: first, to collect additional income for the NLF from the peasant's surplus, and second, to discourage peasants from selling any goods in GVN-controlled areas. While rice was fairly easy to tax, livestock were more complicated. Generally, there was a small free allowance for pigs or cattle, and the remainder of the animal's weight was taxed; in some liberated areas, however, the first 200 kilograms were tax-free and the remainder was charged at 10 percent. Chickens and ducks were usually taxed at 20 percent after an allowance for the first fifty fowl.

Cadres constantly urged the peasants to pay more tax than the fixed scale in order to provide more support for the NLF. A record was kept of each peasant's tax payments in order to determine if he might be capable of giving more. Whether by chance or design, the peasant was taxed just enough to keep him on the brink of disaster. With the possibility of a bad crop due to unforeseeable natural conditions or destruction by military operations never far off, the peasant's economic position was finely balanced.

Social Affairs

It was not all work and no play within liberated villages. Cadres of the propaganda, arts, and education committee of the village board of administration were responsible for celebrating NLF holidays. One of the best-known NLF celebrations was Independence Day, which commemorated the founding of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on September 2, 1945. Cadres organized the peasants for the celebration, during which speeches were given or propaganda materials circulated. Probably the most popular holiday was Ho Chi Minh's birthday, for which the NLF organized elaborate ceremonies and entertainment. During the celebrations the cadres left no propaganda stone unturned; the peasants were repeatedly urged to join in support of the NLF. Patriotic men and women who had distinguished themselves in agricultural production, guerrilla warfare, or some other task were introduced to the peasants and publicly commended. Speeches were made to stimulate the peasants' contribution to the revolution or to congratulate the board of administration for some outstanding achievement. Youth groups frequently performed heroic and patriotic songs.

Because of the insecurity of some liberated villages due to ARVN artillery or air strikes, the NLF celebrations were often held at night; the NLF cadres apparently feared that a large gathering in the village would attract unwarranted attention and perhaps provoke some ARVN action. Another form of security reportedly used by the NLF to avoid detection of celebrations was to hold them earlier or later than the actual date of the event to offset any anticipated action by ARVN.

Cadres used many techniques to urge the peasants to attend the NLF celebrations in the villages. In order to gather the peasants for Ho Chi Minh's birthday, for example, they praised him as the number one patriot who made many sacrifices to save the Vietnamese nation from bondage. Occasionally, the cadres were less subtle and would issue orders that each family in the village be represented by at least one member. If a family failed to attend the ceremonies, all members might be accused of being *Diem-My* sympathizers. Such accusations brought the possibility of investigation for antirevolutionary sympathies, which was extremely dangerous for peasants.

There are many traditional Vietnamese holidays honoring past heroes, men and women, but throughout Vietnam the biggest celebration is *Tet*, the lunar new year. *Tet* is almost universally celebrated in Vietnam by both the NLF and the GVN; prior to 1968 there was a quasi-truce between the opposing forces during the three-day holiday. Another favorite Vietnamese holiday primarily for children is *Trung Thu*, or the Mid-Autumn Festival, during which the children parade through the village with lighted paper lanterns. Until recently, when the intensity of the war forced the peasants to abandon many of their traditional celebrations, festive occasions such as *Trung Thu* were celebrated in NLF villages.

Education. Education was a responsibility of the propaganda, arts, and education committee, which appointed as teachers cadres, former GVN teachers, or those villagers who had a little education and nothing else to do in the village. The quality of education in many liberated villages had fallen off sharply because of inexperienced teachers, some of whom were elders who did not pass their school examinations and remained in the village to farm. The NLF assigned them to teach school and paid them little or nothing. Because the teacher's salary was usually not enough to live on, assistance was needed from the families of the children, who contributed rice, firewood, or other items.

The problem of educating children was compounded by the increased insecurity in liberated villages due to artillery and air strikes. Many peasants preferred that their children remain illiterate rather

than go to school in the face of existing dangers. In spite of the security problems of air strikes and artillery shelling in the liberated villages, however, the NLF attempted to keep schools in operation, primarily because they were an investment in the future and an outlet for propaganda which reached the parents indirectly through the children.

The propaganda content of the children's education provided the NLF another means of molding the peasants' thinking. The lessons in liberated village schools contained propagandistic songs, slogans, and recitations on anti-imperialism, the struggle for independence, and the patriotism of the soldiers on the battlefield which the children memorized and then recited at home to their parents. An example of the propaganda inherent in NLF teaching methods was the lesson on the Vietnamese alphabet: The letter *t* was used in the sentence *Ta danh My* (We are beating the Americans), *M* stood for *My rut ve nuoc* (The Americans shall retreat to their country), and so forth. The children also staged plays on the heroic feats of revolutionaries who were devoted to the cause of the Fatherland, and wrote verses and songs about the deeds of current heroes of the revolutionary war such as Nguyen van Troi and his companion.* Education sometimes also included night classes for adults in subjects such as civics, history, or other academic studies. Of course, history was slanted to favor the NLF and its predecessors, and the other subjects all contained propaganda as well.

One immediate consequence of the children's NLF education was to make their values different from those of their parents. The children were taught to be materialistic and to reject the superstitions and beliefs of their parents, such as in God or Buddha. Ancestor worship was denounced in NLF schools, as were other traditional practices like local methods of curing illnesses.

* On May 10, 1964, Nguyen van Troi and an accomplice were apprehended by GVN security police as they were attempting to mine a bridge on Cong Ly Street in Saigon over which U.S. Secretary of Defense McNamara was due to pass. Troi was executed on October 15, 1964 and almost immediately eulogized in a book, *The Way He Lived*, published by Liberation Editions (South Vietnam), the clandestine NLF publishing organization.

Medical Care. Traditionally, the peasants relied upon Chinese herbs or local "doctors" for the treatment of simple ailments. Peasants with serious illnesses that could not be treated in the village were taken to a town with medical facilities. The division of the rural areas of South Vietnam into NLF- and GVN-controlled zones created problems for the transport of sick and wounded peasants for medical aid. On the whole, liberated villages were noted for their lack of adequate medical facilities to care for the peasants. The medical facilities that did exist in liberated villages ranged from a small sanitation station to a well-equipped dispensary. The NLF attempted to provide some form of medical assistance for the peasants through mobile medical aides, trained in simple methods of treating common ailments, who traveled among several villages in selected areas with a small supply of medicine.

In contrast to the NLF medical aides, there were also "private doctors" in the villages who were equipped to treat peasants and charge a small fee regulated by the cadres. These practitioners were allowed to buy medicine in the GVN areas and bring it into liberated villages. However, their activities were strictly controlled by the cadres to insure that they did not overcharge the peasants.

Maternity cases were usually handled by midwives in the villages, but the dispensaries were equipped with medicines for the treatment of fever, malaria, worms, or headaches. One problem facing the peasant who required medical aid was discrimination in favor of cadres and their families; peasants complained that cadres always had priority for medicines and treatment.

Cadre Recruitment

The social disruption caused by the peasant classification was perhaps best seen in the case of the former landless peasants who became NLF cadres. The former landless peasants who were selected as cadres became, in a sense, the new rural elite in place of the former elders and notables of the traditional village of the past, overturning the village social structure. The gain in political, social, and economic stature made by these peasants over the former traditional leaders of the villages caused considerable resentment among the other peasants.

Another source of peasant resentment was generated in the former Viet Minh guerrillas and cadres who had fought in the Resistance War and who had returned to their villages. Noncommunist ex-Viet Minh were often ignored by the NLF; they were accused of not having a revolutionary spirit and of being less efficient than the new cadres. In the event that a former Viet Minh was brought into the NLF village organization, he usually had to go through a *Hoc Tap* and self-criticism session; if he passed these and other tests he might then be accepted, though not always at his former rank or position.

The selection process for cadre membership involved many steps. It was not always necessary, but usually helpful, if the peasant had connections with cadres who would support or sponsor him. The peasant applicant was usually tested on certain abilities and then given a task to perform. Successful completion of the task led to other more difficult tasks and advancement in the organization. Initial activities for prospective cadres began in the hamlet, then moved up to the village, and so forth. Throughout the induction process, the cadre candidate was subjected to a seemingly endless indoctrination through *Hoc Tap* sessions.

The recruitment of cadres in liberated villages was not restricted to men; many women cadres were also selected. Women filled many positions in liberated villages, including membership on village boards of administration and leadership of the various women's associations. In keeping with the NLF policy of maximizing everyone's contribution in revolutionary war, women often filled positions for which no men were available in the village. Male peasants, however, sometimes criticized the role of women cadres, claiming that only men should fight and that women should stay at home. Whatever the peasants' view of women cadres, however, they did perform many important functions for the NLF. They were especially valuable for *binh van*, the practice of urging families to persuade their relatives to return to the village. Other activities in which women cadres were engaged included propaganda, health services, recruiting, and administration. Because women often travelled to market in town, they provided information on ARVN and GVN activities which contributed to the overall security of liberated villages.

Security Affairs

The need for increased security both in and out of liberated villages become more apparent with the growth of the NLF. Usually it was not until after the board of administration was established that the village guerrilla units were functionally integrated into the local NLF organization under the military affairs and security committees. Like the popular associations and other activities, the village guerrillas were organized by means of the ubiquitous cell system. Basically, there were two different types of guerrilla units in a liberated village, the *du kich thoat ly* (regular guerrillas) and the *du kich tai gia* ("guerrillas at home," or part-time guerrillas).

The regular guerrillas were normally part of a larger military organization made up of several village units which could be grouped together at any time for military operations against appropriate GVN targets. The size of regular guerrilla units depended on the number of qualified men available in the village and the effectiveness of the local military affairs committee in recruiting and training. A large village may have had more than 100 regular guerrillas, while the average appears to have been a platoon or large squad. The better equipped regular guerrilla forces had automatic weapons either captured in battle or supplied by the NLF.* Locally made weapons were also used, but they were mainly in the part-time guerrilla units. A curious type of weapon found in some guerrilla units was the "red stock rifle," so named because it apparently came from the Soviet Union or China without a stock, which was then made from a local red wood.

The part-time guerrillas were organized by the NLF under the principle of *don vi binh tinh vi dan* ("In war peasants become soldiers, in peace peasants are ordinary people"). The part-time guerrillas were recruited and trained in the hamlets where they lived, and their main responsibility was defense of the village. During an emergency, they left their normal occupations to take up their posts. Besides defending the village from small GVN military units, the part-time guerrillas

* The period under discussion here is prior to the large-scale reequipment of the combined Viet Cong/North Vietnamese Army forces with communist-bloc weapons.

supported peasants engaged in sabotage and assisted the cadres in controlling the village population.

Recruiting and training guerrillas was a full-time activity for the military affairs cadres in a liberated village. One enticement offered to the peasants to join the guerrillas was that they would then not be recruited into the Liberation Army and have to fight away from their families. Cadres employed the usual methods of appealing to the peasant's patriotic urges and his sense of duty to the revolution. Although the guerrillas were paid an extremely low wage--if they received anything at all--recruiting was generally successful. The average peasant had no means (other than flight to GVN areas) to resist. The training of guerrillas included not only military tactics but also political subjects. The political study program for a guerrilla comprised a lecture on a chosen subject followed by group discussion, analysis, and conclusion. Of course, there were the never-ending *Hoc Tap* sessions on the duties of the guerrillas.

The guerrillas also provided internal security for the village, the purpose of which was to protect the insurgent cadres and organization from any possible peasant reaction and to prevent the infiltration of GVN agents or other unauthorized persons. Internal security in a liberated village was composed primarily of a network of NLF sympathizers and supporters who were organized by cadres to check on the movements of peasants in and out of the village and to watch all activities going on within the village.

The internal security system was generally a simple one, employing all types of peasants, from buffalo boys in the rice fields to part-time guerrillas in the hamlets. Probably the most widespread technique used for internal security was the *ngu gia lien bao* (families for mutual protection), which had its roots in the ancient traditional Chinese *pao chia* system.⁽¹⁸⁾ As a control method, *ngu gia lien bao* was consistent with the Vietnamese traditions of the nuclear family with its own informal authority structure as the basic unit of society. By merely combining several family units (usually five), the NLF maintained some of the traditional family authority, but within a larger, more controllable unit.

Under *ngu gia lien bao* a leader responsible for the mutual control of the group was appointed from among the five families. Each family was to watch the activities of the other four, and all were responsible for the misdeeds of any members of the group. All political conversations or suspicious activities were to be reported to the group leader and then passed on to cadres. Families with relatives either in ARVN or working for the GVN were special security targets; the activities of those families were closely watched and their movements within the village restricted. Similarly, if a family happened to have a child going to school in the GVN zone, then security cadres paid special attention (bordering on harassment) to their surveillance. Cadres would indoctrinate those families on *binh van* in an effort to recruit their relatives either for the NLF or as secret agents in the GVN zone.

As with the peasant classification, land redistribution, and taxation, the application of *ngu gia lien bao* resulted in further divisions among the peasants, which made them easier to control. Families with relatives serving the GVN were treated harshly by the cadres, and had to undergo constant insults and mistreatment designed to make them outcasts from the rest of the village population. During a village meeting, *Hoc Tap*, or even a celebration, they were seated apart from the rest of the peasants and no one was allowed to talk to them. Cadres sought to alienate them from the rest of the peasants by every possible means short of death or imprisonment. Undoubtedly many peasants had sympathy for those treated harshly by the cadres, but dared not express it for fear of being considered an accomplice.

The culmination of both external and internal security activities (recruitment and training of guerrillas and their integration into other village defense and population control measures) was to transform the liberated village into a *xa chien dau* (combat village). The visible characteristics of a combat village were its physical defenses, such as firing walls around the hamlets with gun emplacements for the guerrillas, trenches, booby traps, and mines placed along the roads and trails leading into the village. Because of the dangerous defense works in a combat village, peasants had to make new trails and paths

for intravillage communication. Although movement between hamlets was possible, it was difficult because of the fighting fences and booby traps; movement at night was virtually impossible because of the number of traps placed on the roads and trails. Even canals were rigged with mines and booby traps so that government forces could not enter a combat village by water.

Probably the simplest means of defense in a combat village, one which could be made by virtually everyone, was the *ban chong* (spike trap, or as it is popularly called, naily board). The *ban chong* was simply a piece of wood with several long spikes driven through it which was then planted in the ground at the bottom of a pit, along a path, or in a ricefield where it was hidden by the growing stalks of rice. For extra effectiveness, the spikes were covered with human excrement or a similar substance to promote infection in the wound of the victim.

To minimize the vulnerability of a combat village to compromise and attack, it was imperative that the cadres strictly control the movements of the peasants in and out of the village. One control method widely employed was the travel permit. Cadres classified the peasants into three categories of eligibility for outside travel: (1) trusted NLF supporters who could leave the village; (2) neutrals who had done nothing suspicious, who could leave the village after informing the security cadres; (3) those who had past or present connections with the GVN, who even had difficulty moving within the village, let alone outside. In order to leave a combat village, a peasant had to secure a permit to travel, stating the purpose, destination, and duration of the trip. Whenever a peasant was stopped while traveling within a liberated zone or to the GVN zone, he was required to produce a valid travel permit. If caught without a permit, the peasant could be accused of spying for the GVN, which might bring harsh measures against him and his family.

That the entire security apparatus set up in combat villages was designed to maintain control of the peasants and their resources is especially evident in NLF restrictions of peasant movements both in and out of villages. Although peasants had been traditionally known

for their relative immobility outside the village area, within the hamlets or villages there had been a considerable degree of social interchange. The construction of combat hamlets made even this innocuous form of intravillage communication dangerous and impractical. The peasants were effectively alienated from each other not only within their native villages but--through various population control measures--even within their own families.

THE GVN COUNTERPART OF THE "LIBERATED" VILLAGE

The successful control of the population in liberated villages not only provided the NLF with continued supplies of rice and recruits but also denied them to the GVN. After the official announcement of the NLF's formation in 1960, the GVN apparently recognized that the threat to its existence was not merely a disorganized group of rural dissidents, but a fully organized and operating revolutionary organization.

In place of its former rather desultory and ineffective response to the increasing activities of the revolutionary cadres in the rural areas, late in 1961 the GVN developed plans for the high-priority Strategic Hamlet Program (SHP). When officially begun in 1962, the SHP was billed as the means to "implement freedom and democracy within a system of order and respect for duly constituted authority, to *liberate*^{*} the Vietnamese people from underdevelopment and division, and to defeat communism."⁽¹⁹⁾ The implementation of the SHP, however, was in great contrast to its lofty aims and promised benefits to the peasants. In many parts of rural South Vietnam the NLF held virtually complete control of the peasants, and in contested areas the NLF often had as much influence over the population as the GVN. Therefore, the SHP would be easiest to implement in the GVN-controlled areas, where ostensibly it would not be needed to "defeat communism." Implementation would be more difficult in the contested areas and almost impossible in the NLF-controlled areas. An official GVN document entitled *From Strategic Hamlet to Secure Village* recognized the formidable obstacles to the implementation of the SHP: "We must take *violent measures*,^{*} moving and reassembling people in selected localities in order

^{*} Emphasis added.

to establish fortified hamlets."⁽²⁰⁾ The "violent measures" were not explicated in the report, but it is assumed that the officials responsible for the implementation of the SHP foresaw a possible negative reaction to the program not only from the NLF but perhaps also from the rural population in general.

Initially, many peasants seem to have welcomed the apparent safety of the strategic hamlets, or *ap chien loc*, and were willing to move into them. But it soon became evident that although there were many potential advantages of the strategic hamlets, there were also many real problems and drawbacks. Notwithstanding NLF activities to destroy the strategic hamlets, from the peasants' viewpoint two main problems of the program contributed to its failure (which, interestingly enough, were the same reasons suggested by the peasants for the failure of the previous Agrovillage program). First, the strategic hamlets were built by conscripted peasant labor, and second, the forced relocation into the strategic hamlets separated the peasant from his ancestral home and made access to his means of livelihood (i.e., his land) more time-consuming and difficult. Peasant complaints about the forced labor were generally leveled at the village officials in charge of the construction. Poor peasants had to work on the strategic hamlets while peasants who were better off could bribe their way out of doing any labor. The discrimination among peasants created resentment toward the SHP and the government; peasants were forced to build not only their own strategic hamlets but also those in neighboring villages when labor was in short supply. During the construction phase of the SHP, peasants in some villages had to work on the hamlets an average of ten days a month.

A more serious peasant complaint about the SHP was that concerning forced relocation. Peasants normally lived on or close to the land they owned or rented, but when they were relocated into the strategic hamlets they had to travel relatively long distances to their rice fields, which added considerably to an already long workday during much of the year and could also be dangerous. The insensitivity of GVN officials to the problems of relocation no doubt contributed significantly to the peasants' reluctance to support the SHP.

Compounding these conceptual failures in many cases were serious administrative deficiencies, combined with the incompetence, avarice, and venality of many government officials. The building of the strategic hamlets in some areas of South Vietnam was nothing more than an administrative exercise whereby overzealous government officials reported the completion of nonexistent hamlets. Many completed strategic hamlets did not achieve even the primary function of providing security for the peasants. Although the hamlets had barbed wire fences and earthworks, many of them had undertrained and poorly equipped defense forces. Often the defense forces retreated into the strategic hamlets at night, which did little to instill confidence among the peasants.

Although the strategic hamlets were supposed to provide the peasants with an alternative to the restrictive conditions of NLF-liberated villages, often they were no better in that respect. Peasants living in strategic hamlets were burdened with restrictive regulations for moving in and out to their fields for precisely the same reasons that such regulations were necessary in the NLF "combat hamlet." The promised liberty for the peasants to earn their living as they pleased did not materialize, and officials in the strategic hamlets often resorted to force in order to control the population.

NLF cadres took advantage of peasant discontent with the SHP, urging the peasants to destroy the strategic hamlets and return to their villages. A simple, indirect action taken against peasants who had left liberated or contested villages--even involuntarily--to move into the strategic hamlets was simply to confiscate their property. However, many peasants, having moved into the strategic hamlets and having found dissatisfaction there, were afraid to return to their villages for fear of reprisal by the NLF; some peasants were indeed punished upon return as an example to the rest of the villagers.

Although the NLF reaction to the SHP varied throughout South Vietnam, it mainly entailed the destruction of the strategic hamlets with minimum risk and cost. Inevitably, the NLF procedure in the destruction of strategic hamlets began with clandestine cadre infiltration, to hold a *Hoc Tap* to explain why action was necessary. NLF

propaganda claimed that because the *Diem-My* no longer had the peasants' confidence, they had adopted the foreign idea of strategic hamlets from Malaya, a country where the spirit of the people had disintegrated. Specifically, the cadres urged the peasants to destroy the strategic hamlets, erect combat hamlets, reconstruct their villages, and conduct a political struggle to urge other peasants to leave the strategic hamlets. To persuade the peasants, the cadres were either subtle or threatening, depending upon the immediate situation. Cadres also infiltrated into the strategic hamlets to spread rumors that the peasants were prisoners in concentration camps, since they had to pay government tax and work without pay while their land (now some distance away) was being stolen or exploited by others. It appears from the effort mounted to destroy the strategic hamlets that the program did have some effect upon the NLF, or at least was viewed as a potential threat to the insurgents' rice, recruits, and information.

The destruction of strategic hamlets was accomplished in many ways, from overt attack by NLF guerrillas to destruction from within. The barbed wire fences and other defenses around the strategic hamlets were destroyed and the hamlet officials and militiamen sometimes caught in a battle between NLF and GVN forces that destroyed their homes and meager possessions.

The bulwark of Diem's national strategy for a pacification program for South Vietnam, the SHP lasted only until his death in 1963. Once Diem was dead, the government of Saigon was run by a succession of military and civilian leaders, each of whom seemed more interested in his own personal power struggle than in the conflict that had been taking place in the rural areas for the preceding nine years. GVN military strength in the rural areas was so drained by the political strife that it was a simple matter for the NLF to pull down the remnants of the SHP. With the temporary obstacle of the SHP out of the way, the NLF turned back to the task of further consolidating and expanding control of peasants in the villages. The GVN efforts to stem the NLF revolutionary tide collapsed mainly because the leaders of the government were either not interested in or not capable of understanding the problems created by the insurgents among the peasants.

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As we have seen, the liberation of villages clearly marked the domination of the peasants by the NLF. Virtually all organizations and activities in the villages were aimed at gaining control over the peasants and channeling their support to the NLF. The demands of the growing revolutionary organization in turn placed greater demands upon peasant support, which led to increased population control measures. In order to protect its support base, the NLF organized an intricate village defense system characterized by mutual suspicion and surveillance among the peasants. This system was reinforced by the village guerrillas, who also took on a more active operational role against GVN forces. To counter the expansion of NLF organizations and activities in the villages, the GVN implemented the ill-fated SHP. Conceptual failures and faulty implementation of the SHP served to alienate as many of the peasants as it protected. When simultaneously faced with a well-organized NLF attempt to destroy the strategic hamlets and the aftermath of the November 1963 revolution, the program collapsed. The NLF quickly moved into the ensuing vacuum of confusion and despair to consolidate its control over the peasants and move closer to its goal of overthrowing the government.

VIII. DIRECTION: THE INSURGENT ENVIRONMENT

The culmination of insurgent activities in rural villages is the establishment of insurgent control. Whatever aspects of the former traditional village environment that still exist do so only under the *direction* of the insurgent organization, whose influence now pervades every facet of the village, completely controlling the social, economic, and especially political activities of the peasant villagers. Direction represents more than just an extension of the preceding domination phase of the insurgent activities in rural villages, for at this stage the actual existence of the insurgent organization is dependent upon marshaling the activities and resources of the villagers specifically and directly for the continuing support of the war. A significant aspect of this phase of activities is that the local insurgent organization does not operate even partially outside the village, but is fully immersed in the rural environment. Thus, villages previously liberated during the domination phase of activities are properly called "controlled" villages when they come under the direction of the insurgent organization.

During the period immediately following Diem's death, the confusion and competition among the new leaders of the GVN was not unlike that faced by Diem himself in 1954 at the conclusion of the Resistance War. The NLF, however, pursued a policy of "wait and see" for only a week or so before beginning to work in earnest to profit from Diem's death and the resulting paralysis within the GVN. The villagers were told that the situation really had not changed in the GVN, that only a new group of leaders had taken over, and that more American participation was to be expected in Vietnamese political affairs. Cadres pointed out that they had foretold the growing American presence in Vietnam several years earlier when they warned of the new imperialism. Accordingly, many peasants listened and believed. As in all NLF propaganda, there was a certain element of truth to what the cadres said.

A significant feature of the propaganda at that time was the direct implication of assistance to the NLF from outside Vietnam, especially from China. By placing the revolutionary war in a larger context, the NLF introduced the peasants to new ideas about the power of its allies

to balance the assistance given the GVN by the United States. China was depicted as a large country whose leader would defend all the people oppressed by imperialism. Cadres often referred to the fact that the Chinese could produce atomic bombs and were helping the Vietnamese as friends without taking advantage of them.

The dissemination of propaganda in a controlled village was usually through *Hoc Tap*. Cadres were very persuasive in their arguments, and although the increasingly savage fighting in the villages may have been expected to introduce some doubts, many peasants continued to believe what they were told and to support the NLF. The continual close contact between the cadres and the peasants introduced communist terms and phrases into the peasants' vocabulary.

THE COMMUNIST ROLE

Probably the most difficult propaganda task confronting the cadres in controlled villages was to convince the peasants of the necessity of relying upon the Communist Party for leadership in revolutionary war. Communism per se was not new to Vietnam, since the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) was formed in 1930 under the leadership of Nguyen Ai Quoc (Nguyen the patriot), better known as Ho Chi Minh. Indeed, the successor of the ICP, the *Dang Lao Dong* (Labor or Communist Party), was the major force behind the Viet Minh and the Lien Viet. Although the Communist Party was illegal in the South and no party organization as such existed, many of the cadres who remained in their villages were still communists. The formation of the NLF as a broad-based organization uniting all the various South Vietnamese classes, political parties, and religious and ethnic groups provided the cover necessary for the communists in the South to reorganize without restoring many of the villagers' old fears about the Communist Party. Cadres were very careful in their use of the term "communism" because for many peasants it had a bad connotation derived from unpleasant experiences during the Resistance War.

The *Thanh Lao*, which was described metaphorically by many peasants as "the nursery of the Party" or "the right hand of the Party," helped to overcome many obstacles in the recruiting and training of Communist

Party members. However the relationship may have been described, it was clear that in controlled villages the Communist Party relied upon the *Thanh Lao* to develop capable young people as prospective party members. *Thanh Lao* members were subjected to a period of testing, either as guerrillas or in political work, before they were submitted as candidates for party membership. Once youth were inducted into the *Thanh Lao*, they were expected to serve the party without question and to perform whatever tasks were required of them.

The public announcement of the formation of the *Dang Nhan Dan Cach Mang*, or People's Revolutionary Party (PRP), on January 18, 1962, did not signal the creation of another new organization in South Vietnam. It was merely another example of the established communist practice of obfuscation--changing the name of an already existing organization, the *Lao Dong* party. The open admission of the existence of the PRP in the South suggests that by 1962 the revolutionary cadres must have considered their organization strong enough so that it no longer needed to obscure the fact that the Communist Party was in fact the guiding force behind the revolutionary war. In effect, the pretense was dropped; while the peasants had heretofore referred to the unacknowledged communist NLF cadres as *Ong Mat Tran* (front man), they now simply called them "Viet Cong," although the cadres themselves did not use the term.* According to an official U.S. publication, the PRP declared itself "the vanguard of the NLF, the soul of the NLF."⁽²¹⁾

In villages liberated by the NLF and controlled by the PRP, the cadres undertook the task of explaining the role of the communists. The Communist Party was depicted as having a clear-sighted view of the goals of the revolution and the necessary leadership to achieve those goals. By referring to the support given them by the Communist Party in other countries, the cadres implied that they were supported by allies equal to or greater than those of the GVN.

*The term *Viet Cong*, the etymology of which was explained in Section IV, is generally used to describe not only individual insurgents but also the whole revolutionary organization in South Vietnam. As specifically used here, Viet Cong represents the combined PRP-NLF organizations. Although the PRP is theoretically subordinate to the NLF, there is little doubt of the dominant communist influence in that organization--hence the term Viet Cong.

Although the PRP was formed in 1962, peasants in controlled villages generally became aware of the party somewhat later, around 1963 or 1964. The lag probably resulted from the time necessary to develop an extensive party apparatus at higher levels before it could be transmitted to the villages. As with many other Viet Cong organizations, peasants in controlled villages often saw some form of historical relationship between the PRP and several preceding organizations. Despite the nationalistic, anticolonial motives of the Viet Minh, some peasants recognized the communist guidance in that organization as well as the Fatherland Front and the NLF by the ICP, the *Lao Dong* party, and the PRP, respectively. The change of names mattered very little because, in essence, it was still the Communist Party that was the guiding force of revolutionary war.

The selection process for prospective party members drawn from outside the *Thanh Lao* was rigid and lengthy. The time necessary to become a party member varied for different categories of candidates: Landless or poor peasants were admitted within three months if they proved to be loyal, obedient, and able to perform the tasks required of them, while peasants of other classifications had to wait a minimum of six months or more. The number of party members varied, but it appears there were at least 30 to 40 PRP members in a Viet Cong-controlled village.

Although the establishment of the PRP had been openly announced (and thus was known by practically everyone living in controlled villages and by many of those living in contested or GVN-controlled villages), the Viet Cong still attempted to maintain the fiction that the PRP was merely another subordinate member organization of the NLF. Although communist doctrine was minimized by the cadres, it was difficult to disguise PRP direction of the NLF and all associated activities in the villages, which was especially evident in the relationship between the PRP cadres and NLF village board of administration. The chairman of the board of administration and the committeemen for military, security, and economic and financial affairs were almost always PRP members. Usually only the vice-chairman and social affairs positions were open to noncommunists. The control of the board of administration by communists was emphasized by the party organization in the village, which

was virtually identical in structure; each position on the board of administration was duplicated in the PRP organization.

Despite the existence of a PRP organization paralleling the NLF board of administration, however, there appeared to be little integration of functions between the two. For example, the party secretary of the village was not necessarily the chairman of the board of administration. The NLF chairman of the board of administration was engaged directly in administrative activities in the village, while the PRP secretary remained distant from the peasants, primarily for security reasons. Whereas the NLF chairman was accessible to the peasants, the PRP secretary was contacted only through party channels. PRP control of the NLF also extended to the popular associations, and often the head of the *Nong Hoi* or other leaders were PRP members.

DIRECTION AND DISCIPLINE IN VIET CONG-CONTROLLED VILLAGES

One of the first indications that the Viet Cong had definitely entered the direction phase of the peasant-insurgent relationship in a village was a shift in policy from voluntary recruitment to conscription of youth into the Liberation Army. It seems reasonable that the Viet Cong felt that their ever-growing strength, coupled with the declining GVN position, would allow such a policy shift without incurring undue risk. Apparently the Viet Cong were trying to capitalize on the repeated failures of the successive governments in Saigon, which seemed to indicate (to them and to many contemporary noncommunist observers) that it was only a matter of time until ARVN collapsed and with it the entire U.S./GVN effort to contain the communist forces in South Vietnam. Perhaps anticipating victory, the Viet Cong began drafting youth for military service in order to provide the rapid force buildup necessary to make the final offensive moves against the demoralized and near-defeated ARVN.

In controlled villages, Viet Cong cadres began implementing the new draft policy for all men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. The draft was called "military duty"; cadres said that so many weapons had been supplied by countries friendly to the Viet Cong that everyone could have a gun to fight. Military duty was to be for a

period of three years, with only cadres exempt. Apparently the increased requirements of the Viet Cong army have forced cadres in some areas to lower the draft age, as there have been many reports of fifteen- and sixteen-year-old guerrillas fighting in the Liberation Army. At this time the Viet Cong also introduced *dan cong* (people's labor), that is, compulsory labor (as much as three months per year) required for all peasants not eligible for the draft. During the all-important rice transplanting and harvesting seasons, demands were lessened to avoid diminution of the crop. Cadres kept notebooks on each peasant's *dan cong* time and task; anyone shirking his duty was considered anti-revolutionary. As might be expected, there were few volunteers for *dan cong*, even among the "conscious" peasants who were overt supporters of the Viet Cong. Nonetheless, cadres emphasized that *dan cong* had to be undertaken to protect the revolutionary bases of the Viet Cong.

Considering peasant aversion to previous forms of impressed service--e.g., corvée labor under the French and forced construction work on the Agrovilles and strategic hamlets--it is no small wonder they were discontented with *dan cong*. The cadres faced problems in getting the peasants to perform *dan cong*, because it entailed difficult and dangerous tasks. There were two categories of *dan cong*: front-line and rear-line. Front-line *dan cong*, in which the peasants accompanied the guerrillas to the battlefield, was organized to provide continuous support to the Viet Cong during the fight. The peasants carried weapons and ammunition to the battle and brought back the dead and wounded guerrillas. *Dan cong* was the cheapest means of transportation available for the guerrillas and also one of the most efficient. Supplies were mostly conveyed at night in order to avoid detection by ARVN.

On occasion the peasants became involved in extremely dangerous front-line *dan cong* tasks such as digging trenches around a GVN outpost, laying mines prior to an attack, or even crawling between the barbed wire surrounding the outposts to plant satchel charges. This was particularly terrifying to the peasants because they faced the same dangers and hardships as the guerrillas, but were unarmed and unable to defend themselves.

Rear-line, as opposed to front-line, *dan cong* was mainly manual labor, time-consuming but rarely dangerous. Primarily, rear-line *dan cong* was used to construct defensive works around combat villages and to sabotage lines of communication leading into and out of controlled areas. Peasants built roadblocks, dug ditches, and made obstacles for canals and waterways. Even the elders engaged in *dan cong* tasks such as making *ban chong* to be placed in traps around a combat village. Not all rear-line *dan cong* was directed solely at destructive or defensive works; some benefited the peasants themselves. Cadres taught peasants how to dig ditches that would both impede ARVN movements and at the same time irrigate their fields. Dikes and canals for flood control were also constructed by peasants working on *dan cong*. Usually, the peasants provided their own hand tools and sometimes sampans or ox-carts to move earth.

Refusal to perform *dan cong* could have serious, if not fatal, consequences for a peasant. At the first offense, cadres would usually warn the peasant or reprimand him. Repeated offenses would lead to reeducation, which often took place in camps located in remote jungle areas. The Viet Cong used reeducation as a means of punishment for the "stiff-necked elements" who were "politically unconscious" and did not perform their assigned tasks. Landowners, social undesirables, and the disobedient usually were sent for reeducation. There was no allowance for disobedience in a controlled village, and reeducation was an effective means of correcting antirevolutionary behavior. Other offenses for which peasants could be sent for reeducation ranged from tax evasion to social misbehavior such as drinking or gambling. The length of reeducation varied with the so-called crime; sometimes a peasant spent only a week or two, while more serious offenders were kept six months or more. Reeducation was a powerful device for controlling peasants, not so much because of its pedagogical success, but more for its direct impact upon peasant livelihoods; prolonged absence from the rice fields could mean decreased food production for an individual's family.

The full impact of Viet Cong direction of peasant activities was well demonstrated in the establishment of the detention camps, which closely resembled political prisons. Usually the camps were located

in areas remote from the GVN zones, such as the U-Minh forest.* The inaccessibility of the camps made escape extremely difficult and was an added security measure against GVN detection. Living conditions in the camps were barely tolerable in the dry season, but during the six-month monsoon everything was flooded and all movements were made by sampan. The prisoners lived in thatched huts camouflaged with branches to avoid detection from the air. As many as twenty prisoners were crammed into a single small hut.

The main problems for the prisoners in the camps were food and health. Cadres supplied barely enough rice to sustain a prisoner, and fish and meat were rarely available. Prisoners who fell ill had to care for themselves, although simple medicines were available for treatment of minor ailments. Many of the health problems resulted from the overcrowding of the camps and the scarcity of even simple precautionary devices such as mosquito nets; they were compounded by the methods used to restrain the prisoners. A common practice for controlling prisoners was to use handcuffs or leg irons;** several prisoners were chained together in a row, day and night, except for the morning toilet. The close supervision of the prisoners and the leg irons made escape virtually impossible.

Within the camps the daily routine of the prisoners was divided between physical labor and political indoctrination, a process known as *lao cai* (*lao*, work; *cai*, reform; i.e., reform or reeducation through hard labor). One of the most common tasks for male prisoners in the

* The U-Minh is a large flooded forest located in the upper Ca-Mau peninsula area. It was well-known as a base area for the Viet Minh forces and now serves the Viet Cong. It has never been successfully controlled by either the former French colonial government or the current GVN.

** On occasion the open press would report incidents in which Vietnamese civilians were found chained together and shot, ostensibly by their Viet Cong guards when ARVN forces were sweeping through the area of a prison camp. One such incident was reported in *The New York Times*, March 12, 1967, p. 3. During a sweep by ARVN rangers in Vinh Binh province, they found a handcuffed and blindfolded Vietnamese civilian who had been stabbed and left for dead. He related to his liberators that he had been captured on the way from the province capital to his village and held for 15 months.

camps was to cut the roots of a tree locally known as *chay*, which were then made into rope. Women prisoners were used as cooks and performed other less laborious tasks in the camps.

All prisoners were subjected to the process of *chinh huan*, often misinterpreted as the general term for *lao cai*. Actually it is "correctional training," a more advanced and intensive form of reeducation. *Chinh huan* usually began with confessions of the prisoners' misdeeds. Next came the well-known step of *kiem thao* (self-criticism), during which the prisoners analyzed their crimes. On some occasions the *kiem thao* included a group criticism of a prisoner.

In addition to the confessions and *kiem thao*, the thought reform of the prisoners was encouraged by constant *Hoc Tap* on a variety of subjects ranging from NLF Rural Reconstruction Regulations to a slanted view of the traditional Vietnamese spirit of resisting foreign invasion. Cultural training was provided for the poorly educated. Elementary reading, writing, and composition were taught by means of examples from books and newspapers.

Release from the reeducation camp usually came after the prisoners had confessed their crimes, satisfactorily completed *kiem thao*, and generally proved themselves to be "politically conscious." Prisoners were not always released after completing all these requirements, however; some were sentenced to hard labor for an additional period. Moreover, release from the reeducation camp was not the end of the prisoner's problems with the Viet Cong. When a prisoner returned to his village, he had to report to the local cadres and was placed under *quan che* (house arrest) for a time.

The reeducation camps were not used exclusively for peasants, but also for cadres who had been found guilty of various kinds of misbehavior. One of the remarkable features of the Viet Cong organization was the iron discipline imposed upon the cadres; any violation for misbehavior, lack of enthusiasm and ability, or other antirevolutionary activity was met with severe punishment. The Viet Cong placed a high premium on maintaining reasonably good relations between the peasants and cadres, even in the direction phase of their activities.

Cadre misbehavior often involved an abuse of authority that created resentment and open dislike among the peasants. The harsh implementation of certain policies also created dissatisfaction toward some cadres among the peasants, which could often lead to the cadres' removal from the village. One of the more serious social misdeeds which could lead to removal and reeducation was illicit relations with peasants; chastity was one of the most strictly enforced rules of behavior in cadre-peasant relations, and violation could result in the cadre's death.

Short of death, the worst possible punishment for a cadre was removal from the Communist Party. Usually before a cadre was cast out of the Party he went through *chinh huan* in order to determine if he was capable of redeeming his faults. A general policy for removing some of the older, less effective Party members was *chinh ly dang* (Party correction). A cadre who had been removed through *chinh ly dang* was considered a ruined man who could no longer work for the revolution.

SECURITY IN CONTROLLED VILLAGES

Especially during the direction phase of the peasant-insurgent relationship, the cadres tightened population control measures within controlled villages. New security measures were introduced to guard against GVN attempts at infiltration and to prevent peasants from fleeing controlled villages. One of these was a complex alarm system. From the perimeter of a village toward the center a series of control posts were manned by peasants, each of whom had a specific signal to indicate the presence of GVN forces or other unauthorized persons. The signals used were often variations of common peasant activities such as burning rubbish or hanging out clothes in a particular pattern. The chain reaction of the signal system effectively warned the Viet Cong cadres of penetrations into a village.

The most extensive means of controlling peasant activities within Viet Cong villages was through "people's security," a form of internal security that evolved from the *ngu gia lien bao* system and was designed to involve virtually every peasant in a village. The essence of people's security was to make each peasant responsible for the actions of his neighbors. The peasants in turn were organized into security blocs

headed by cadres from the security affairs committee. Any suspected peasant had to be watched by the other members of the security bloc, who then became responsible for any misdeeds he might commit. Although people's security was similar in form and function to *ngu gia lien bao*, the Viet Cong dropped the pretense of mutual cooperation and emphasized the mutual security aspect. People's security provided the Viet Cong with a relatively simple, inexpensive system for maintaining control of the peasants.

One effect of people's security was to contribute further to the isolation of the individual peasant within his own village. Peasants were afraid of their neighbors because they knew they were being watched. If for some reason one person did not like another, a false denunciation for some forbidden activity could bring heavy punishment to the accused, who rarely had a fair opportunity to defend himself. Peasants often decried the internal security system because it separated them from their neighbors and friends, and no one could be sure who would report even the most innocuous conversation to the security cadres. Thus the cadres were able to effectively disrupt the peasants' spirit of cooperation, one of the foundations of the traditional village.

In addition to the people's security in controlled villages, in some villages the Viet Cong established *khu an toan* (security zones) which were off limits even to the local residents. Usually, the security zone in a controlled village comprised one or two hamlets which might temporarily house a higher headquarters or military command post. Sometimes these areas contained "fighting hamlets," and cadres built secret roads and trails among the hamlets of a security zone. Whatever the purpose of the security zones, the Viet Cong made great efforts to isolate them from the rest of a controlled village in order to conceal the activities there from the peasants.

Control of peasant movements in and out of Viet Cong villages was maintained through an even more stringent permit system than before. The network of checkpoints and informants on movements in and out of the village was increased to provide cadres with more information on peasant activities. Anyone leaving the village was investigated upon his return. If a person was suspected of any security violation, his family

would be held in custody until he was cleared. The usual punishment for peasants caught outside the village without a permit was reeducation, sometimes in a camp far from the village.

Even if a peasant went through the procedure of obtaining a permit to leave the village, his activities while in the GVN zone were watched by Viet Cong agents or other peasants from the same village. Occasionally, the Viet Cong used wives of trusted cadres or guerrillas as agents. They would be allowed to go to market, not to purchase items but to watch the peasants who had come into town. Any suspicious activities were reported to the cadres, who called the suspected peasant to account for his actions. Cadres often used propaganda to dissuade peasants from going to town. Rumors were circulated that the people living in the GVN zone would cheat peasants from Viet Cong villages and treat them poorly. When a peasant was cheated or detained by GVN authorities for questioning, the cadres had him tell the peasants in the village of his unfortunate experience upon his return. The mere possibility of an innocent question by GVN officials was an effective deterrent to travel, since the Viet Cong were more than likely to be extremely suspicious of such contacts. Under these circumstances, traffic between liberated and GVN zones decreased markedly.

To further isolate the peasants within their villages, the Viet Cong attempted to cut off all external sources of ideas and influence completely. Listening to GVN radio, reading non-Viet Cong newspapers, or receiving government mail were all prohibited in controlled villages. Probably the most difficult of these restrictions to enforce was to forbid peasants to listen to the radio. The introduction into South Vietnam of small, inexpensive transistor radios allowed even the poorest, most remote villages to be within range of a government-operated radio station. Transistor radios were generally not forbidden in controlled villages, but listening to GVN stations was strictly prohibited. Cadres directed the peasants to listen only to Liberation Radio, the Viet Cong clandestine station that operated in South Vietnam, or to Radio Hanoi, which beamed programs to the South. If a peasant was caught listening to a Saigon station broadcasting news, his radio would be confiscated and he might have to undergo reeducation. On the other hand, peasants

were merely reprimanded if cadres found them listening to *cái-luong*, the traditional Vietnamese musical drama.

The restrictions against reading newspapers, books, or other printed matter from the GVN zone were equally severe. Women returning to controlled villages from market had their baskets searched for newspapers, which were confiscated if found. To compensate for the lack of reading material, the Viet Cong used posters, pamphlets, and leaflets for disseminating their version of the war news. The rigid regulations also forbade the reading of GVN leaflets dropped by aircraft. After a leaflet drop, cadres sent specially selected *Nong Hoi* or *Thanh Lao* members to gather them up and destroy them. Peasants caught with leaflets in their possession were candidates for reeducation.

The control of mail coming through the government post, telegraph, and telephone service (PTT) was somewhat different from that for radios and newspapers. The restriction of PTT mail made the isolation of Viet Cong-controlled villages virtually complete. Notwithstanding Viet Cong restrictions on government mail, PTT postmen could not travel in controlled areas because of the security situation. People living in the GVN zone who wanted to contact a relative in a Viet Cong zone had to use an intermediary to carry the letter. Sometimes a person would merely give the carrier a message to report to the recipient.

The necessity of maintaining some form of intravillage communications in Viet Cong zones led to the creation in controlled villages of *tram giao lien* (commo-liaison stations), a series of stations linked by messengers. The commo-liaison stations handled military and official communications as well as personal mail. Members of the Liberation Army sent letters to their families through the commo-liaison system, and peasants sent personal messages on occasion. Some messengers used motorbikes or motor-driven sampans to maintain the communications link with other villages. Although there were many links in the Viet Cong commo-liaison chain, the system was relatively efficient and rapid. News of Viet Cong military victories as well as other propaganda was disseminated through the system.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES IN CONTROLLED VILLAGES

The virtually complete isolation of controlled villages from government contact included restrictions on the movement of agricultural goods to GVN zones, which was part of the overall Viet Cong blockade designed to deny village rice production to the government-controlled cities and towns. The blockade was applied flexibly, so that peasants in some villages were allowed to sell part of their rice surplus, whereas others were not. Generally, Viet Cong cadres tried to persuade the peasants to keep their rice for their own consumption in order to avoid any possible shortages. In some cases, the restrictions were such that peasants could not even take their rice out of the village to be milled.

One subtle method employed by the cadres to restrict rice movement was to tell the peasants that the GVN wanted to destroy all their paddy to create an import demand for surplus American rice. Peasants were urged to bury their paddy in order to save it from destruction. The underlying purpose of such a practice was manifold: to protect stored paddy from GVN attacks, to restrict movements of rice to town, and to add to the image of the United States as a neocolonialist exploiter. Peasants were taught to build low granaries of mud rather than the bamboo and rattan huts normally used for storage purposes.

When local cadres did allow peasants to sell a certain amount of their rice in GVN areas, it was no easy matter. A network of checkpoints and control posts along canals and roads leading out of the villages ensured that peasants took out no more rice than was authorized. Mobile checkpoints, such as sampans with outboard motors, were also used to control rice movements. Peasants had to secure a permit from the board of administration to sell their rice, which entailed paying a tax. Usually the amount of rice was restricted to less than 50 *gia*, as it was assumed that the proceeds from anything over that amount would be large enough that they could only be used for fraudulent or antirevolutionary purposes. In addition, at some of the checkpoints the peasant was charged as much as 15 percent tax for the movement of his rice, which left him only a small amount to sell in town.

An alternative to permitting peasants to sell their paddy outside a controlled village was to allow selected merchants to come into the

Viet Cong areas to buy rice. Cadres supervised the buying operation and the movements of the merchants. The price, fixed by the Viet Cong, was often as high as that in town. Moreover, these merchants could not escape the omnipresent tax and sometimes paid as much as 15 percent of the value of the rice purchased.

One of the results of the isolation of Viet Cong-controlled villages directly influenced the everyday life of the peasant. Because of the restrictions on movement and the high taxes, village merchants often were unable to maintain a stock of basic necessities such as cotton cloth, kerosene, salt, and *nuoc mam*.^{*} Because of the scarcity of such items, prices in controlled villages were higher than in GVN towns, which made the items all the more unattainable for the peasants. On occasion, cadres allowed some women in a village to go to town to buy basic supplies for themselves and other peasants. Also, despite Viet Cong restrictions on some items, the peasants bought them secretly and smuggled them into the village.

The Viet Cong deliberately forbade the purchase of so-called "luxury" items on the grounds that they were brought to Vietnam by the Americans to intoxicate and exploit the peasants. Expensive cloth or exotic foods were banned as luxury items; instead, men and women alike wore plain black cotton trousers and shirts and for the most part ate only what was grown in the village. Nylon fabrics, foreign-made soap, and cigarettes were considered luxury items; alcohol above all was strictly forbidden.

In areas where there were canals or waterways, the Viet Cong often allowed sampan-borne merchants to come to controlled villages to sell certain basic supplies. Usually the price of the goods was higher than in a town market, because the merchant paid a high tax in order to do business. Occasionally peasants paid the merchant to bring them specific goods on a return trip, but again the price was higher than normal and the risk to the peasants great. Not only were the sampan merchants subject to Viet Cong control, but the GVN also watched their

^{*} *Nuoc mam* is a pungent sauce traditionally made from the juices extracted from fish allowed to decay in a pit covered with leaves and earth. It is universally used in Vietnam to season virtually every type of food and is highly nutritious.

movements in and out of the controlled zones and sometimes confiscated their goods.

The economic controls introduced by the Viet Cong were directed not only at preventing movement of goods marketable outside controlled villages but also at extracting from the peasants more support for the NLF. Another levy upon the peasants was the "liberation bond." The bonds were sold to peasants for various amounts, from 100 piastres for the poor to 3000 piastres or more for richer peasants. Payment for liberation bonds was either in cash or paddy, according to the peasant's resources. According to the cadres, the bonds would be redeemable when the revolution had successfully overthrown the GVN.

During the *Hoc Tap* held to explain the purpose of the liberation bonds, cadres pointed out that the money and rice collected would be used to feed the troops in the Liberation Army. Many peasants knew of the measure as "the troop supporting bond" or some such name. The Viet Cong cleverly timed the announcement of the bonds to coincide with harvest season, when the peasants had some surplus available. Usually, cadres came to the peasants' houses and asked them to buy a bond to help the revolution. It was difficult for the peasants to refuse, because the cadres knew how much rice they had harvested that season. Moreover, refusal could be construed as being antirevolutionary, which invited retribution.

The resourcefulness of the villagers in avoiding the numerous contributions and taxes imposed by the Viet Cong was matched by that of the revolutionary cadres in creating methods by which to separate the peasants from their meager resources. Another useful device was *hu gao khan chien* (rice to support the resisters), better known as "a handful of rice," which was ostensibly to be used to feed the troops of the Liberation Army. Each time they cooked a meal, peasants were to put a handful of rice into a jar, which was collected each month by women from the popular associations. Sometimes this was combined with an anti-American appeal called a "handful of rice against the Americans." In some villages peasants substituted an "anti-American chicken" in place of the handful of rice. Almost no peasant family in a controlled village could escape the measure. Moreover, if cadres thought that the

jar contributed by a family did not contain enough rice, they would demand that it be filled to their satisfaction.

The economic controls in Viet Cong villages appear to have existed primarily for the support of revolutionary military forces. It has been speculated, however, that such measures were merely a prelude to a more advanced form of economic control, especially in areas of long-term Viet Cong domination. Little or no information has been obtained on the formation of incipient communes in South Vietnam like those in Red China or like the ill-fated copy-communes of North Vietnam. The closest to what may have been considered an advanced form of economic control was the so-called collective community. Peasants reported that this form of controlled community existed in the Ca-mau peninsula, where the Viet Minh and Viet Cong have maintained almost continuous control since 1945. Within the collective community, peasants worked on the land and were in turn allowed to use the yield to feed their families according to the number of members. The remainder of the crop belonged to the collective community and was used at the discretion of the cadres in charge. However, only one example of such an organized means of living and production has been reported in South Vietnam, and it should not be inferred that the practice is widespread in Viet Cong areas.

In addition to the many economic changes that have taken place in controlled villages, there have been some less noticeable but nonetheless important changes in the former traditional ceremonies and social activities of the peasants, one of the more established and elaborate of which was the wedding. Weddings were planned well in advance of the occasion and were noteworthy for their expense, relative to the peasant's income. The Viet Cong urged peasants to cut down on the ceremonies to save their resources for the revolution. An even more drastic step was to replace the traditional wedding celebration in controlled villages with a "proclamation ceremony," which included a gathering for tea and cakes and a declaration of marriage. The traditional ceremony, including long dresses and gifts to the bride, was no longer used. During the proclamation ceremony, cadres and guests stood before a Viet Cong flag while the reason for the gathering was announced. Cadres took the opportunity to lecture the guests about some suitable revolutionary

subject. When the congratulations and lecture were over, the ceremony often was concluded with a *vu hoa binh* (peace dance).

Another example of social changes that have occurred in controlled villages is the new ideas that have been introduced and accepted by the youth. Traditional relations between the sexes were no longer observed. For instance, elders were appalled by activities like the peace dance, in which unmarried couples openly held hands and danced together. The youth also showed lack of respect toward parents and elders and failed to carry out the prescribed rites of ancestor worship.

Many of the changes were brought about through the cadres' intensive indoctrination, in which almost every medium was used to convey propaganda. When a team of artists and dancers came to a village, they no longer performed the traditional Vietnamese dramas but substituted "patriotic" plays especially written to incite the peasants to support the war. The artists' subcommittee of the village board of administration often gave theatrical presentations of plays such as *Dua con dat Nuoc* ("The Son of the Fatherland"), *Sau ngay toi loi* ("After the Sinful Days"), or *Huong ve que me* ("Towards the Mother Country"). In the play "After the Sinful Days," the main actor recalls his sinful actions when he was with the GVN and killed NLF cadres. He repents, joins the Party, and wants to serve the nation by redeeming his sins. "Towards the Mother Country" is a story of a young ARVN soldier at a frontier post who decides to give up his rifle and come back to his village, where his mother yearns for him day and night.

The extent to which cadres worked to transform the peasants into a fully contributing component of revolutionary war was illustrated in the "three responsibilities" for women. Consistent with the Vietnamese penchant for series of threes, * women were urged to take responsibility

* The concept of three is pervasive throughout all aspects of Vietnamese life, beginning with the division of the country into three regions: *Bac* (North), *Trung* (central), *Nam* (South). Similarly, Vietnamese life is dominated by three major forces: physical, spiritual, and cosmological. The individual possesses three souls (*ba hon*): one for life itself, one for intelligence, and one for the five senses. Three misfortunes (*tam tai*) may befall an unfortunate individual: fatal accident, sickness, and loss of fortune. The Vietnamese schooling system is based upon three forms: *thieu hoc* (primary education), *trung hoc*

in raising the family, to work in the fields, and to do administrative work in the village to free the men to join the guerrillas. Another list of requirements for younger women was the three "not yets": not yet fallen in love, not yet engaged to be married, and not yet ready for marriage. The male equivalent of the "three responsibilities" was the "three readinesses": ready to join the guerrillas, ready to serve the armed forces anywhere, and ready to obey and faithfully serve the Party. The Viet Cong also exploited the Vietnamese preference for three in terms of village security. For example, if GVN soldiers came to a village during a military sweeping operation, the peasants were taught to know nothing, hear nothing, and see nothing. A variation of the three nothings, to be used in the same situation, was empty house, empty garden, and empty well, so that no support could be given to the government soldiers.

A special social and political problem which the Viet Cong had to face in controlled villages was the handling of the various minority groups. With the exception of the Montagnards, who mainly inhabited the highlands of Central Vietnam, the largest minority groups were the Cambodians and Chinese, both of whom were concentrated in and around the Mekong Delta. In many areas, the Cambodians and Chinese living in controlled villages were not always subjected to the same control policies as the Vietnamese peasants.

Most peasants agreed that the cadres sometimes treated the Cambodians and Chinese more favorably than the Vietnamese. Cadres explained that although those groups were foreigners, they still joined the fight against the GVN and had made many sacrifices. The Vietnamese and Cambodians have been historic antagonists for several centuries; Cambodians were living in the Mekong Delta long before the Vietnamese pushed down from the North and conquered the area. At present, many Cambodians still refer to the Mekong Delta as "lower Cambodia," remembering their former control of the territory.

The Viet Cong have tried, at least on a modest scale, to gain the support of the ethnic minorities or to neutralize their support of the

(secondary education), and *dai hoc* (higher education). It will be remembered that a basic program of the Viet Minh and Viet Cong was the *tam cung* (three together).

GVN. Cadres explained to peasants that the neutralist policies of Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia aided their cause and that they must welcome, accept, and support the Cambodians still living in South Vietnam. According to the cadres, the Cambodians have two fatherlands, Vietnam and Cambodia. Because the Cambodians practice a different, more organized form of Buddhism and are more involved in their religion than the Vietnamese, the Viet Cong have attempted to gain the support of Cambodian bonzes, or monks, as an example for others to follow.

The Chinese minority, although ethnically more closely allied to the Vietnamese than the Cambodians, have generally been politically and economically distinct. Usually, the most prosperous merchants in villages both in and out of Viet Cong zones have been Chinese. Cadres have been instructed not to disrupt in any way the special relationships of the NLF with local Chinese merchants. Of necessity, they have been given preferential treatment by cadres to induce them to conduct essential business in controlled villages. For instance, although the Chinese pay taxes and make contributions to the Viet Cong, their rates are usually lower than those for the Vietnamese. Moreover, it has been suggested repeatedly in unofficial sources that the large Chinese minority in Cholon has been an important source of supply for the Viet Cong.

PEASANT SUPPORT OF THE VIET CONG

One of the many seemingly anomalous situations in the revolutionary war in South Vietnam is the Viet Cong attempt to portray the cadres as benign leaders of the mass of peasants while using them as the instruments for enforcing the ever-increasing restrictions and demands made upon the population. Once the Viet Cong gain control of a village and direct peasant activities, it seems merely academic whether or not the population accepts the presence of cadres; the only function of the peasants is to obey and support the revolution. However, in the midst of the increased savagery and hardships of revolutionary war, the Viet Cong have still attempted to gain peasant acceptance of cadres through conviction rather than coercion.

Because the cadres in controlled villages often experience the same hardships as the peasants, there appears to be a basic identification

between the two groups. Cadres are often clad in the same black peasant dress, eat the same food, and live under the same conditions as the peasants. Many peasants are sympathetic towards the cadres because of their high morale, strict discipline, fairness, and concern.

Not all peasants view the cadres in this manner, particularly those locally recruited cadres who have been elevated to positions of authority over the peasants of the same village. Peasants generally dislike and distrust locally recruited cadres because they are from the village and thus know more about the personal habits and vulnerabilities of the peasants than would outside cadres. A second frequent criticism is that former landless peasants who were socially, economically, and politically below the former village notables and elders have assumed positions of leadership in the village. Many peasants resent the fact that those who were illiterate and poor before they joined the Viet Cong have since become arrogant and abusive in their newly attained authority.

Although some abuses are certain to take place, particularly among the lower levels in the hamlets and villages where the cadres are less organized, trained, and experienced, discipline among the cadres has generally been good. Moreover, despite mounting personnel losses resulting from increased U.S./GVN actions, the overall political base of the Viet Cong in rural villages appears to remain relatively solid because of the extensive and effective organization and control of the peasant population in many areas of South Vietnam. A continuing problem for the GVN has been to determine the strength and depth of support for the Viet Cong in villages, that is, the degree of the peasants' commitment to revolutionary war. As evidenced by peasant responses, they themselves can only (or are only willing to) speculate on this subject. Official figures are equally suspect because of the lack of sustained contact with peasants in controlled areas and because of the natural tendencies to omit or play down unpleasant assessments. Present quantitative evaluation methods of the security situation in the villages of South Vietnam are not capable of assessing the degree of peasant support for the Viet Cong.

THE MEANING OF THE INSURGENT ENVIRONMENT

It is possible that the full effects of Viet Cong control of rural villages in South Vietnam may never be assessed adequately even after the shooting has stopped. This brief summary of the nature of the insurgent environment in rural villages may help to place in perspective some of the social, economic, and political changes which have been wrought upon the peasants of South Vietnam through the revolutionary activities of the Viet Cong.

The seemingly least obvious, but ultimately most significant, changes that have occurred in rural villages as a result of Viet Cong control are those included under the general rubric of social disruption. The purpose of the extensive Viet Cong organization in villages is to control the activities and resources of the peasants in order to channel their support for revolutionary war against the GVN. The effect of the rigid Viet Cong control system in villages is to isolate the peasant from his neighbors, friends, and even family. The peasant can no longer turn to his own family to find security, since the extensive and intensive propaganda of the Viet Cong has pervaded virtually every living group. Because of the Viet Cong emphasis on youth, many children have left their homes to join the insurgents against the wishes of their parents. Family solidarity, long a key element in the stability of peasant society, is a thing of the past. As in other countries during internal upheavals, so in South Vietnam; members of some families may be fighting for different sides in the war. The peasant has not only seen his family cohesion disintegrate but has also suffered the loss of many of the traditional beliefs which formerly sustained him through the arduous task of earning his living. Religion is barely tolerated, and familiar ceremonies and practices are forbidden or reduced to mere formalities used for propaganda sessions. The regimentation of the peasants in Viet Cong-controlled villages has resulted in the loss of personal identity; because of their isolation, the peasants have become passive and controllable.

Viet Cong control of the peasants' means of economic production through land redistribution, taxation, and restrictions upon the sale

and movement of agricultural products serves a double purpose, providing the troops and cadres of the revolutionary armed forces with a continual supply of rice and other products and denying that supply to the GVN. But the policy of economic blockade is not entirely a net gain to the Viet Cong. With the introduction of U.S. and allied armed forces, the Viet Cong have had to increase their forces, which in turn requires more support from the peasants in liberated areas. But rice production in Viet Cong-controlled areas is decreasing because of shortages of manpower, seeds, and fertilizer and because of the widening scale of combat in rural villages. The simplest method of increasing the rice supply available to the Viet Cong armed forces is to take more from the peasants. New measures have been introduced to separate the peasant from his meager fare and provide more rice for the Viet Cong. The result has been a poorer standard of living for the peasants, with an attendant loss of incentive to produce any surplus beyond that necessary to keep the peasant's family alive.

As we have shown, the peasants provide the Viet Cong with an important source of manpower for revolutionary war. In place of the earlier emphasis on voluntary enlistment of peasants for the Viet Cong armed forces and guerrillas, conscription in the form of "citizen's duty" has been introduced in controlled villages. Those unable to serve in the armed forces (either because of age or infirmity) still cannot escape their duty, because the civilian program of forced labor involves virtually everyone, even children. The recruiting requirements of the Viet Cong are not only for the military, since the political organization must also expand with the increase in territory and population brought under control through military actions. The corps of elite cadres (initially drawn from those left in the South after 1954 or those who subsequently returned from the North) has been depleted, and recruitment of local cadres has been undertaken. The political development and mobility of former peasants through the Viet Cong organization has been one of the significant strengths of the revolutionary movement in Vietnam, providing the Viet Cong with whole new generations of cadres for maintaining revolutionary war and effecting basic changes in controlled villages. Through the process of economic leveling of all villagers,

former leaders have been removed and replaced by those who were socially, economically, or politically subordinate to them in the past. The local cadres, as the new rural elite, personify the social disruption attendant upon revolutionary war as they assume positions of power in the village and exercise control over their former fellow villagers.

IX. THE PEASANTS CAUGHT IN REVOLUTIONARY WAR

Although many villages in South Vietnam have come under the control and direction of the Viet Cong, the resultant insurgent environment has not necessarily brought a stable, secure existence for the peasants, who are pressured from the inside by the Viet Cong and from the outside by the GVN. The dilemma of most peasants in the villages of South Vietnam today is that of being caught between the opposing sides of revolutionary war, which they aptly describe as being "on the anvil and under the hammer" or as "living under two yokes."

One of the real tragedies of the revolutionary war in South Vietnam is the plight of the peasants who continue to live in their villages, till the soil, and face the omnipresent possibility of death. Although the Viet Cong have certainly urged the peasants not to leave controlled villages to become refugees, the more deep-seated and compelling reason why most remain where they are rather than flee is their tie to the land or love of the soil. To the peasant, the earth is a vital spiritual as well as economic element in his life. He not only derives his living from the soil but also buries his ancestors there. This deeply rooted, traditional concept of the peasant's relationship to his land has acted as a constant counterforce to his initial impulse to run away in the face of the obvious threats to life and property. Vietnamese peasants express their tie to the land simply as *Nguoi dau cua do* ("A person's heart belongs there").

Viet Cong cadres have successfully exploited the peasants' attachment to their land in order to persuade them not to depart for the GVN areas; propaganda cadres constantly inveigh against the living conditions of the refugees in GVN areas as a means to persuade peasants not to leave. Through sad experiences the peasants themselves know that more often than not they will be treated unkindly, cheated, and looked upon with suspicion if they do go to live in the GVN areas. Moreover, most peasants are rice farmers and as refugees would have little opportunity either to pursue the only occupation they know or to learn a new one. Working as coolies in the GVN areas is beneath the dignity of the peasants who, even in spite of the dangers, would rather remain in their villages and on their land.

PEASANT DISAFFECTION WITH THE VIET CONG

As the revolutionary war in South Vietnam enters its ninth year, there appears to be growing peasant dissatisfaction with the Viet Cong in rural villages. The causes for this dissatisfaction are many, ranging from individual personal problems with specific cadres to the harsh implementation of overall Viet Cong policies. Moreover, it appears that the majority of peasant complaints can be related to the establishment of the insurgent environment in their villages by the Viet Cong, which suggests that certain vulnerabilities of the insurgent environment exist which could be exploited by the GVN to try to break the Viet Cong hold on the peasants living under such conditions.

The deepest peasant disaffection with the Viet Cong probably has its roots in the social upheavals that have been part of the insurgent environment. Those peasant landowners living in the villages whose land was confiscated and redistributed were often reduced to the status of the poorest peasants. Thus, their disaffection stems from the reduction in their former power and prestige and its replacement by the party apparatus in the village. Even middle-class peasants who owned barely enough land to support their families were victims of redistribution, and this has alienated many of them from the Viet Cong. Finally, the curtailment of many of the traditional social activities within villages has made the peasant's already drab life even more bleak.

To meet the increased strength of the GVN and its allies, the Viet Cong has had to extract more support from the peasants and in turn maintain stricter control over the population in liberated villages. Harsher control measures have been necessary to ensure that needed resources are effectively channeled to the insurgent forces. The strict limitations on movement, rice sales, and commodity purchases in Viet Cong villages have created further resentment in the peasants.

Another peasant complaint is the misbehavior of the guerrillas in controlled villages, specifically the locally recruited guerrillas. Peasant complaints generally center on the inability or disinclination of the local guerrillas to protect their villages from ARVN sweeps, artillery, and bombing. According to many peasants, the local guerrillas fire a few shots at an approaching ARVN unit, then run away and leave

the peasants to withstand the artillery and bombardment that is sure to follow. The guerrillas also will sometimes fire at a plane overhead and then retreat to a safe area while the village is bombed in retaliation.

Despite the increased damage in controlled villages due to artillery and bombing, Viet Cong cadres keep up a steady stream of propaganda, shifting the blame for the attacks on ARVN. Cadres say that the imperialists have bombed the villages and that the peasants must work harder to help drive them out of their country. The main purpose of the propaganda is to dissuade the peasants from leaving their villages, which would deprive the Viet Cong of an important resource for the war. In some cases, the cadres have taken extreme measures, such as holding the members of a family hostage, in order to keep peasants from leaving the village.

Despite continual cadre promises, peasant disaffection with the Viet Cong made them less hopeful of victory. As the costs to the peasants of the protracted revolutionary war rise, their confidence in eventual victory diminishes.* Even hard-core supporters and cadres have become dissatisfied after long periods of doubt about the overall policy of revolutionary war, which may be interpreted as their reluctance to make further sacrifices for what appears to be a losing cause. The morale of the peasants has ebbed, and most of them merely go through the motions of supporting the Viet Cong. The peasant-insurgent relationship in South Vietnam today is now the reverse of Mao Tse-tung's famous analogy for the relationship between the people and the insurgents;** it is now probably more appropriate to say "When the water goes down to the bottom of the river the fish show."

GVN INEFFECTIVENESS IN WINNING PEASANT SUPPORT

The present dimensions of the war in South Vietnam and the numerous potential elements of peasant disaffection in the insurgent

* It is not possible at this writing to determine what effects the Tet offensive and subsequent Viet Cong military operations against Saigon have had on peasant expectations of an insurgent victory.

** "The people may be likened to the water and the insurgents to the fish who inhabit it." (22)

environment of Viet Cong-controlled villages indicate that opportunities exist for the GVN to regain peasant support against the insurgents. Yet the evidence available to date shows slow progress, if any, in this important area of government activity against the Viet Cong. In fact, although the Viet Cong organization has suffered increasingly on the battlefields, it appears to be growing stronger politically in the rural villages. The numerous pacification programs sponsored jointly by the United States and the GVN have a consistent record of failure, while the so-called Viet Cong infrastructure (i.e., insurgent environment) in the rural villages grows stronger and more effective.

To attack the Viet Cong revolutionary base in South Vietnam directly, the GVN must destroy the insurgent environment in rural villages and regain the support of the peasants. Unlike military strategy, where the insurgents may retreat temporarily in order to advance later, the Viet Cong cannot reverse the direction of its political activities in the rural villages, since that would be tantamount to an open admission of defeat and would destroy the foundation upon which the whole revolutionary war in South Vietnam is built. All the control measures, resource allocations, political activities, security organizations, and military defenses that make up the insurgent environment in rural villages depend upon continued control of the peasants living there. This inexorable process cannot be relaxed without the most damaging consequences to the insurgents. The assumption that the Viet Cong may reduce their strict controls over the rural population seems of questionable validity and based upon false or incomplete knowledge of the nature and extent of the insurgent environment in South Vietnamese rural villages.

Yet the GVN must have exactly this knowledge about the insurgent environment to gain peasant support in defeating the Viet Cong. One main problem appears to be that the GVN has been unable to recognize many of the fundamental changes that have occurred in the rural villages as a result of Viet Cong organization and control. The social upheavals and isolation of peasants in their villages has apparently gone unnoticed by the GVN, and this lack of perception has resulted in the planning and implementation of unrealistic pacification programs which do not take these important factors into account. For example,

the widespread land redistribution undertaken by the Viet Cong has nominally given most peasants in controlled areas their own land--if not legally, then at least symbolically. To accomplish land reform, the Viet Cong had to overturn the village social structure and create artificial divisions between groups of peasants. GVN land reform programs, however, have tended to preserve the status quo rather than take into account the changes that have already occurred. Moreover, the government land reforms have not presented viable alternatives to the Viet Cong redistribution, which is based upon a plot of land for everyone to till.

All too often, the GVN alternatives presented to the peasants are no better than their present situation in Viet Cong-controlled villages. For instance, in theory the strategic hamlets were to provide the peasants with security and the opportunity to pursue their livelihood without the restrictions common to Viet Cong control. In practice, however, the restrictions placed upon the peasants living in strategic hamlets were as oppressive as those in the "combat hamlets" of the Viet Cong. Thus, the peasants saw little advantage in supporting the government, and many of them remained in their villages under Viet Cong control.

Many peasants have also condemned the GVN pacification programs as ineffective and indiscriminate, leading to the seizures of loyal peasants. Pacification has consistently failed to identify and separate hard-core Viet Cong supporters and cadres from the mass of peasants. Moreover, the failure of past pacification efforts is in part attributable to the lack of an institutional memory in the GVN; there appears to be little inclination on the part of those responsible for such programs to learn from past mistakes. Some rural villages have gone through three or more cycles of pacification with little visible improvement in their physical security, let alone removal of the Viet Cong organization.

Part of the failure of pacification to gain peasant support against the Viet Cong is a personnel problem. Past and present government cadres charged with this responsibility have all too often been urban dwellers uninitiated and uninterested in the problems of the peasants. The reality of the rural-urban gap is starkly reflected in peasant

criticism of GVN cadres as insensitive to their needs or incapable of helping them with their problems. At least the current Revolutionary Development cadres have not been accused of the misbehaviors often associated with past pacification personnel, but the peasants still consider them ineffectual in comparison with the Viet Cong cadres. Peasants are quick to recognize the differences between the distant, disinterested demeanor of the GVN cadres and the close personal relationships established by Viet Cong cadres.

The government's indiscriminate use of bombs and artillery against villages can be seen as the large-scale counterpart of the lack of personal relationships between GVN cadres and the peasants. Although the Viet Cong themselves cause considerable damage in villages, unlike the GVN they do not possess aircraft or heavy artillery (excluding rockets, which are usually directed at urban centers, not villages). The manifestations of the destructive capacity of these weapons in villages has made the government seem almost wanton in its destruction. The Viet Cong in turn exploit such destruction through propaganda which claims that because the GVN has no scruples about killing them, the peasants must rely upon the insurgent forces to protect them.

The failure of the government to capitalize upon the vulnerabilities of the insurgent environment in rural villages has undoubtedly helped prolong the war. Returning to the proposition stated in the beginning of this Memorandum--that a basic requirement for success in revolutionary war is the support of the rural population--it is obvious that the *sine qua non* for defeating an insurgency is the support of the rural population. Thus it is at the village level that the revolutionary war in South Vietnam is being fought and lost.

EPILOGUE: THE PEASANTS' PLEA FOR PEACE

The current revolutionary war in South Vietnam has often been characterized as a complex struggle involving many social, political, military, and other factors, all of which must be taken into account before any acceptable solution to the conflict may be found. Indeed, the preceding review of Viet Cong activities at the village level has demonstrated the accuracy of such a statement. It is also at this lowest

level of the conflict, the rural villages, that the fundamental nature of revolutionary war may be found. Stripped of its various political coverings, military actions, and other obscuring factors, revolutionary war is bared as a sociopolitical struggle involving every resource--human, material, ideological--available in a given society. It is in the rural villages that the real sentiments of the peasants who are directly involved in revolutionary war are heard.

Perhaps no voices speak louder in their plea for peace than those of peasants who have been surrounded by revolutionary war for more than twenty years, first against the Japanese, then the French, and now the GVN and its allies. The sentiments of these war-weary peasants are that they would welcome any form of authority, communist or otherwise, which they thought would bring peace and security and allow them to return to their villages and their occupations. At present, the war has produced in the peasants a state of unresponsiveness which is exploited by the Viet Cong. The peasants' general apathy toward the war and its conclusion is such that they would follow anyone who could bring peace to their villages. The peasants' desire for peace at almost any cost and their frustration at not being able to achieve it is the essence of their present dilemma.

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Appendix

DATA ON PEASANT INFORMANTS

<u>Serial Number</u>	<u>Informant</u>	<u>Province</u>
1	40-year-old tenant farmer	Hau Nghia
2	45-year-old peasant landowner	Hau Nghia
3	Viet Minh political cadre	Hau Nghia
4	Tenant farmer	Hau Nghia
5	Catholic peasant landowner	Hau Nghia
6	62-year-old peasant landowner	Hau Nghia
7	54-year-old landless peasant	Hau Nghia
8	Elderly Cao Dai woman peasant	Hau Nghia
9	Landowner	Hau Nghia
10	50-year-old landless peasant	Hau Nghia
11	Peasant landowner	Hau Nghia
12	Middle-class peasant landowner	Hau Nghia
13	Peasant landowner	Hau Nghia
14	Peasant landowner	Hau Nghia
15	Woman peasant landowner	Hau Nghia
16	Peasant landowner	Hau Nghia
17	Peasant with land taken by NLF	Hau Nghia
18	48-year-old landless peasant	Hau Nghia
19	Peasant landowner	Hau Nghia
20	NLF schoolteacher	Chuong Thien
21	NLF intelligence agent	Chuong Thien
22	NLF mobile medical aide	Chuong Thien
23	Peasant with land taken by NLF	Chuong Thien
24	45-year-old peasant landowner	Chuong Thien
25	Peasant with land from Viet Minh	Chuong Thien
26	Woman with land taken by Viet Minh	Chuong Thien
27	Village military affairs committeeman	Chuong Thien
28	54-year-old peasant landowner	Chuong Thien
29	51-year-old tenant farmer	Kien Giang
30	Landowner prosecuted by Viet Minh	Chuong Thien
31	Tenant farmer	Chuong Thien
32	Catholic landowner	Chuong Thien
33	Itinerant tradesman	Chuong Thien
34	NLF youth cadre	Chuong Thien
35	Landowner with land taken by Viet Minh	Chuong Thien
36	Village "private doctor"	Chuong Thien
37	Landowner with land taken by Viet Minh and NLF	Chuong Thien
38	Peasant fisherman	An Xuyen
39	Hamlet military affairs committeeman	An Xuyen
40	Woman dressmaker	An Xuyen
41	Peasant of Chinese origin	An Xuyen
42	Middle-class peasant landowner	An Xuyen
43	Landowner	An Xuyen
44	Viet Minh education cadre	An Xuyen
45	Viet Minh guerrilla	Chuong Thien

<u>Serial</u>	<u>Informant</u>	<u>Province</u>
46	Peasant landowner	Chuong Thien
47	Middle-class peasant landowner	Chuong Thien
48	Peasant landowner	Dinh Tuong
49	Peasant landowner	Dinh Tuong
50	Peasant with land from NLF	Dinh Tuong
51	Woman peasant landowner	Dinh Tuong
52	Middle-class peasant landowner	Dinh Tuong
53	NLF propaganda cadre	Chuong Thien
54	Peasant with land from NLF	Chuong Thien
55	Viet Minh company political cadre	Chuong Thien
56	Tenant farmer	Kien Giang
57	Peasant with land from NLF	Dinh Tuong
58	Vegetable seller	Dinh Tuong
59	Landless peasant	Dinh Tuong
60	Tenant farmer	Chuong Thien
61	Hog merchant	Kien Giang
62	Rice mill worker	Chuong Thien
63	NLF village cadre	Kien Giang
64	Landless peasant	Dinh Tuong
65	Tenant farmer	Dinh Tuong
66	Peasant landowner	Kien Giang
67	Peasant with land from Viet Minh	Kien Giang
68	Middle-class peasant, <i>Nong Hoi</i> member	Chuong Thien
69	NLF political cadre	Chuong Thien
70	Labor (i.e., communist) party cadre	Chuong Thien
71	<i>Nong Hoi</i> cadre	Chuong Thien
72	Peasant with land from Viet Minh	Chuong Thien
73	Village cadre, party member	Chuong Thien
74	<i>Nong Hoi</i> member	Chuong Thien
75	Peasant with land from NLF	Chuong Thien
76	Peasant with land from NLF	Dinh Tuong
77	<i>Nong Hoi</i> member	Dinh Tuong
78	Village merchant	Dinh Tuong
79	Tenant farmer	Dinh Tuong
80	Peasant with land from NLF	Dinh Tuong
81	Peasant with land from Viet Minh	Dinh Tuong
82	Peasant landowner	Dinh Tuong
83	Peasant landowner	Dinh Tuong
84	Peasant landowner	Dinh Tuong
85	Peasant with land from NLF	Dinh Tuong
86	Cao Dai peasant landowner	Dinh Tuong
87	Peasant landowner	Dinh Tuong
88	Peasant landowner	Hau Nghia
89	Landless sugarcane farmer	Hau Nghia
90	Peasant landowner	Hau Nghia
91	Landless sugarcane farmer	Hau Nghia
92	Landowner	Hau Nghia
93	Landless sugarcane farmer	Hau Nghia
94	Tenant farmer	Hau Nghia
95	65-year-old peasant landowner	Hau Nghia
96	Peasant landowner	Hau Nghia

<u>Serial</u>	<u>Informant</u>	<u>Province</u>
97	Tenant farmer	Hau Nghia
98	Refugee	Hau Nghia
99	Horsecart driver	Hau Nghia
100	Peasant landowner	Hau Nghia
101	Refugee	Long An
102	Peasant landowner	Chuong Thien
103	Landless sugarcane farmer	Hau Nghia

<u>Category</u>	<u>Percent of Total Sample</u>
1. Peasant landowner	28
2. Landless peasant or tenant farmer	17
3. Peasant who received land from Viet Minh and NLF	13
4. Viet Cong (NLF) activist	11
5. Miscellaneous village occupations	9
6. Middle-class peasant	5
7. Landowner	5
8. Landowner with land taken by Viet Minh and NLF	5
9. Viet Minh activist	5
10. Refugee	2
	<u>100</u>

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